

## Proposed Resolution for the Endorsement of Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions

WHEREAS Palestinian civil society has issued a call for a campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel as long as it violates international law and Palestinian rights;

WHEREAS Palestinian students and academics have little recourse to address violations of their rights to free speech, assembly, association, and movement;

WHEREAS Israeli institutions of higher learning are a party to Israeli state policies that violate human rights and negatively impact the working conditions of Palestinian scholars and students;

WHEREAS in the recent (July-August 2014) war on the Gaza Strip dubbed “Operation Protective Edge”, Israeli universities declared they “embrace and support” the efforts of the Israeli Defense Forces, the same efforts which resulted in the deaths of 2,131 Palestinians, over 500 of whom were children, and 71% of whom were civilians;

WHEREAS Israeli professors and students at Israeli universities who speak out against discriminatory or criminal policies against Palestinians are ostracized and ridiculed if not publicly shamed, or worse;

WHEREAS academic institutions in the United States, Europe, and around the world, such as the American Studies Association, the Association for Asian American Studies, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, have endorsed the boycott of Israeli academic institutions;

WHEREAS these decisions, which were arrived at freely and democratically after engaged discussion and debate (sometimes several years in duration), have been greeted by condemnation, such as the statements of 250 university and college presidents, including the AAUP, and draconian attempts to curtail free speech, such as the bills proposed by New York and Maryland state legislators in the spring of 2014 to ban the use of state funds to academics and institutions that associate with professional institutions that or that themselves endorse the boycott;

WHEREAS in announcing the City University of New York’s condemnation of the American Studies Association endorsement of the boycott, then-Interim Chancellor William P. Kelly also announced “a new joint MBA program between the Zicklin School at Baruch College and the College of Management Academic Studies in Rishon LeZion”;

WHEREAS the Doctoral Students Council (DSC) of the Graduate Center, CUNY, democratically represents students and their interests;

WHEREAS the DSC wishes to support Palestinian students and academics in their struggle against the Zionist policies of the Israeli state and its restrictions, a struggle that is frequently deprived of access to materials, resources, and discussion by the Israeli state;

WHEREAS the DSC understands that the boycott of Israeli academic institutions is *not* the boycott of or prohibition of collaboration with individual Israeli scholars, nor does it engage or support any other ethnic or religious discrimination;

WHEREAS the DSC understands that academic freedom in Palestine and Israel is contingent upon free and open exchange and movement for Palestinian students and scholars and visiting students and scholars in and out of the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel;

Be it RESOLVED that the DSC hereby endorses the boycott of Israeli academic institutions and the divestment from Israeli companies, and calls for the end to the partnership between Baruch College and the College of Management Academic Studies;

Be it further RESOLVED that the DSC condemns the statements of university presidents that denigrate, ostracize, and intimidate scholars and students engaged in open debate on this issue.

Be it finally RESOLVED that the DSC condemns any and all legislative efforts to curtail the right of scholars and students to engage in academic boycotts as it is a basic aspect of free speech and association.

## Frequently Asked Questions About the BDS Resolution Before the DSC

Created by the GC student campaign in support of the resolution

October 17, 2014

### Q1: What is BDS?

**A:** BDS stands for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, and means the boycott of Israeli cultural and academic institutions, divestment from the Israeli state and Israeli companies, and the imposition of sanctions on the Israeli state. These three tactics were called for by Palestinian civil society in 2005 to help achieve three main demands, which, if met, would put the state of Israel in compliance with international law:

- 1) the end to the Israeli state's occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, and the dismantling of the separation wall between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza;
- 2) the recognition of the equal rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel; and
- 3) the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and land per United Nations resolution 194.

Countless groups and individuals around the world have endorsed BDS, including the Student Representative Council of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, which endorsed academic boycott in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

### Q2: What is the BDS resolution the DSC is considering?

**A:** The BDS resolution was organized, written, and introduced to the DSC by a number of GC students. It provides 12 contexts for the resolution (the "Whereas" statements), and proposes that the DSC officially support four things (the "Resolved" statements):

- 1) "boycott of Israeli academic institutions and the divestment from Israeli companies";
- 2) an "end to the partnership between Baruch College and the College of Management Academic Studies" in Israel;
- 3) condemnation of the numerous "statements of university presidents," including by CUNY's then interim chancellor, that followed the American Studies Association endorsement of academic boycott in December 2013, statements that have sought to stifle discussion of BDS; and
- 4) condemnation of "any and all legislative efforts to curtail" the discussion of academic boycott, such as the legislation that passed the New York State Senate and was introduced into the New York State Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

### Q3: Why was it introduced to the DSC to consider?

**A:** It was introduced to the DSC given the DSC's long history of supporting social-justice issues, from its first resolution, which opposed the Vietnam War,<sup>3</sup> to its most recent resolution in support of accessible mental-health insurance coverage. Other DSC resolutions include ones in opposition to City College's seizure of the Morales/Shakur Community and Student Center and the NYPD's surveillance of Muslim students groups, and ones in support of the New York State DREAM Act and Occupy Wall Street. This resolution in support of Palestinian solidarity and in opposition to the Israeli state's occupation and colonization of Palestine follows the precedent of these earlier resolutions; it is firmly within the DSC's longstanding commitment to political engagement and democracy.

### Q4: If the resolution passes, what will its effects be on GC students?

**A:** There are six effects, none of which compel individual students, whether a DSC representative or not, to participate in academic boycott:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2012/university-of-the-witwatersrand-student-council-passes-boycott-resolution-9470>

<sup>2</sup> <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/academic-freedom>

<sup>3</sup> <http://cunyds.org/2014/09/statement-regarding-the-consideration-of-a-resolution-endorsing-the-boycott-of-israeli-academic-institutions/>

- 1) a passed resolution will commit the DSC, as a body, to abide by the guidelines for academic boycott as set forth by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.<sup>4</sup> This means the DSC will not be able to engage in partnerships with Israeli academic institutions. Nor will it be able to provide funding to groups or individuals officially representing Israeli academic institutions. The key distinction here is “officially representing”: individual students or faculty members, or groups of students or faculty members, are *not* subject to boycott because of their affiliation to an Israeli academic institution. Only individuals or groups officially representing an Israeli academic institution, in the way that the president or administrators of the GC officially represent the GC by virtue of their positions, or in the way that the DSC officially represents the GC by virtue of its constitution as a student government, are subject to boycott. GC individuals and groups can still meet and work with their Israeli counterparts under academic boycott.
- 2) a passed resolution will commit the DSC, as a body, to abide by the guidelines for divestment from Israeli companies. As the DSC has no funds invested in the state of Israel or in Israeli companies, this portion of the resolution is an expression of solidarity with the goals of divestment. It will also provide support for any effort to call upon the GC or CUNY as a whole to divest from the state of Israel or from Israeli companies, should any such investments be found.
- 3) a passed resolution will mean that the DSC, as a body, formally supports an end to the partnership between Baruch College and the College of Management Academic Studies in Israel;
- 4) a passed resolution will mean the DSC, as a body, formally opposes statements by university leaders who wish to stifle discussion of BDS;
- 5) a passed resolution will mean the DSC, as a body, formally opposes any legislative efforts to constrain academic freedom regarding BDS;
- 6) a passed resolution will provide support for any GC student who wishes to engage in a personal boycott of Israeli academic institutions or Israeli companies, or who agree with any or all of the points above.

**Q5: If the resolution passes, will it prohibit DSC representatives and GC students from working with Israeli students or discussing political issues with them?**

**A:** No, as the boycott only constrains the DSC as an academic body to adhere to the academic boycott. The boycott does not target individual academics. Indeed, an upcoming GC event about Israel’s immigration policies includes an Israeli curator as well as a CUNY faculty member who supports BDS.<sup>5</sup> Such an event would still be allowed to happen if the resolution passes.

**Q6: How does the DSC resolution fit into the overall Palestinian-solidarity movement in U.S. academia?**

**A:** Several U.S. academic associations have voted to endorse the academic boycott of the Israeli state, including the Association of Asian American Studies, the American Studies Association, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, and, most recently, a group of hundreds of U.S.-based anthropologists, along with international scholars.<sup>6</sup> If the DSC resolution passes, the DSC would be the first student government in the U.S. to endorse academic boycott.

**Q7: Does BDS imply an end to the Israeli state?**

**A:** No, BDS does not imply an end to the state of Israel. It is a set of tactics designed to pressure the Israeli state to end the occupation of Palestine and its discriminatory policies against Palestinians in housing, education, and employment, as well as the (often violent) restriction of Palestinian movement through checkpoints and the separation wall. The same tactics were used successfully to end the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108>

<sup>5</sup> <http://centerforthehumanities.org/program/infiltrators>

<sup>6</sup> <https://anthroboycott.wordpress.com/>

**Q8: Is BDS anti-Semitic?**

**A:** No, BDS is not anti-Semitic. In fact, it has no ethnic or religious component, as it targets the Israeli state and institutions and not individual people. BDS is expressly about *not* targeting people who are Jewish, nor does it target Israeli citizens. Instead, it is expressly a tactic to pressure the Israeli state to change its policies concerning Palestine by holding institutions accountable to the state's actions. Furthermore, Israeli state policies do not represent all Jews. Indeed, a group of 350 Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors endorsed BDS after the Israeli offensive on Gaza this summer.<sup>7</sup>

**Q9: What role do Israeli academic institutions play in the occupation and colonization of Palestine?**

**A:** Israeli universities, colleges, and research centers have extensive links with the occupation and colonization of Palestine. Ariel University and parts of Hebrew University are on the occupied lands. Tel Aviv University and Ben Gurion University work to develop technology for the Israeli military. The Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya gives academic course credit to students who agree to defend Israel's state policies. Many Israeli universities, including Haifa University and its geostrategy department, boast of influencing Israeli state policies such as the separation wall. Moreover, almost all Israeli universities give special academic treatment to soldiers, veterans, and reservists in the form of scholarships and even additional course credit for military experience, and these rewards increase during offensives like the one in Gaza this summer. At the same time, Israeli universities actively discriminate against Palestinian students. For example, the Atidim financial aid program, which helps students from low-income backgrounds, only encompasses areas whose residents are drafted—that is, all people who are not Palestinian.<sup>8</sup>

**Q10: Does BDS limit academic freedom?**

**A:** BDS supports academic freedom by pressuring the Israeli state to end the occupation of Palestine and its discriminatory policies against Palestinians in housing, education, and employment, as well as the (often violent) restriction of Palestinian movement through checkpoints and the separation wall. When the aforementioned end, Palestinians will have far greater academic freedom than they do now. Currently, Palestinian citizens of Israel attend segregated schools. Israeli university admissions standards disadvantage Palestinian citizens by requiring knowledge of Hebrew and English, and the Israeli state has never permitted the establishment of an Arabic-language university. In 2008, Israeli medical schools raised the minimum age of admission from 18 to 20, dissuading Palestinian citizens, who do not serve in the Israeli military (as many Israeli young people do before attending college), from applying.<sup>9</sup> Academics who are vocal critics of Israeli state policies, such as historian Ilan Pappé, face great hostility from Israeli society and have been effectively forced into academic exile. Furthermore, as the discussions regarding this resolution confirm, BDS invites academic discussion and engagement with dissenting scholars.

**Q11: Why doesn't the resolution call for the boycott and divestment of academic institutions and companies, respectively, in other countries that also are charged with violating human rights?**

**A:** The resolution is in response to a call from Palestinian civil society to boycott Israeli academic institutions and to divest from Israeli companies in order to pressure the Israeli state to end its occupation and colonization of Palestine and its discriminatory policies against Palestinians in housing, education, and employment, as well as the (often violent) restriction of Palestinian movement through checkpoints and the separation wall. There is no other international call to engage in boycott of or divestment from another country's academic institutions or companies. The resolution expresses solidarity with Palestinians who are trying to hold Israeli academic institutions and companies accountable for their complicity in structures of oppression, discrimination, and violence, in the same way

<sup>7</sup> <http://ijsn.net/gaza/survivors-and-descendants-letter/>

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see "The Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories" by the Alternative Information Center, a joint Palestinian-Israeli research institute, at <http://www.bdsmovement.net/files/2011/02/EOO23-24-Web.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> See Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011, 99-100.

that so many GC students try to hold the institutions of the GC and CUNY at large accountable for their complicity in the same. The history of the DSC is proof of that.

### Further Readings (and a Video)

International guidelines on the boycott of Israeli academic institutions:

<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108>

“The Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories” (Alternative Information Center):

<http://www.bdsmovement.net/files/2011/02/EOO23-24-Web.pdf>

University of Witwatersrand Student Representative Council’s resolution endorsing BDS:

[http://www.bdssouthafrica.com/2011/08/university-of-witwatersrand-student\\_29.html](http://www.bdssouthafrica.com/2011/08/university-of-witwatersrand-student_29.html)

“Could a Woman Be Smarter Than Noam Chomsky? On Gender, BDS and Democracy” (Christina Nadler):

<http://christinanadler.com/could-a-woman-be-smarter-than-noam-chomsky-on-gender-bds-and-democracy/>

“On the Proposal for the CUNY Graduate Center’s Doctoral Students’ Council to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions” (Conor Tomás Reed and Gordon Barnes):

<http://reviews.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/19556/on-the-proposal-for-the-cuny-graduate-centers-doct>

“CUNY Stands for Justice: From Ferguson to Palestine” (video; starts at 35:30):

<http://videostreaming.gc.cuny.edu/videos/video/1872/>

Statement endorsing BDS by 350 Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors and victims:

<http://ijsn.net/gaza/survivors-and-descendants-letter/>

“Changing My Mind About the Boycott” (Joan Scott):

<http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/JAF/2013%20JAF/Scott.pdf>

FAQ from Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions:

<http://anthroboycott.wordpress.com/yes-but/>

“Academia, the ‘Battleground’ in the Palestinian Solidarity Movement” (Mondoweiss):

<http://mondoweiss.net/2014/10/battleground-palestinian-solidarity>

### In solidarity,

Colin P. Ashley, sociology

Gordon Barnes, history

Andy Battle, history

Balthazar Becker, English

Robert Bell, Middle Eastern studies

Tahir Butt, urban education

Matt Chrisler, anthropology

Khaled Al Hilli, comparative literature

Rayya El Zein, theater

Talisa Feliciano, anthropology

Sean M. Kennedy, English

Velina Manolova, English

Melissa Marturano, classics

Christina Nadler, sociology

Zeynep Oguz, anthropology

Yasemin Özer, anthropology

Lindsay Parme, anthropology

Kristofer Petersen-Overton, political science

Jeremy Randall, history

Douaa Sheet, anthropology

Alexandra Schindler, anthropology

Conor Tomás Reed, English

Cihan Tekay, anthropology

Öykü Tekten, English

Erik Wallenberg, history