

GSOC FOR OPEN DIALOGUE ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Why vote NO on BDS?

There are many reasons to vote against the BDS referendum.

- Some reasons are political: BDS is not only inappropriate and ineffective as a tool for peace, it actually undermines the peace process.
- Other reasons are procedural: even if you support BDS as a tactic, there are serious problems with the way it is being enacted at NYU.
- Still more reasons are strategic: even if you support BDS as a tactic and aren't worried about the procedural issues, endorsing BDS will undermine our bargaining power as a union.

Here are just a few of these reasons.

1. Political reasons

1. BDS's one-sided approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict is inflammatory, naïve, and intellectually dishonest. By placing the entire blame on Israel and calling for unilateral action, it ignores the intense complexity of the conflict, in which both Israelis and Palestinians are deeply complicit, and it denies the validity of Israeli fear, suffering, and historical narratives. In doing so, it both condones Palestinian terrorism and rejects Israeli good will, thereby reinforcing the Cycle of Violence that has fueled the conflict for decades.
2. BDS's demand for unilateral action is unrealistic. The security barrier, which lies at the heart of BDS's critique, was built to protect civilians in Israel from prolonged waves of daily Palestinian terrorism; Israel cannot be expected to dismantle it without assurance that doing so will not compromise the security of Israeli civilians. In fact, Israel bowed to international pressure ten years ago and unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza Strip – evacuating all Israeli civilians and military operations from the area, and handing over jurisdiction to the Palestinian authority. In response, a fresh wave of near-daily, terroristic rocket fire shot over the border from Palestinian-controlled Gaza into Israel. BDS is demanding that Israel repeat the mistakes of history, acting unilaterally in ways that compromise public security, without putting any pressure for an end to Palestinian terrorism.
3. Central to BDS's rhetorical campaign is its mischaracterization of Israel as an "apartheid state" -- this is factually incorrect, and therefore both slanderous and inflammatory. Read more here (<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-oren-israel-apartheid-20140518-story.html>), here (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/22/israel-injustices-not-apartheid-state>), here (<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/reflections-of-a-lebanese-woman-in-israel/>), and here (<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/The-Israel-that-Arabs-dont-know-449469>).
4. Our BDS referendum joins the global BDS movement in calling for a wide-ranging, blanket academic boycott of Israeli institutions and individuals. Despite the claims of NYU activists, both the referendum and the global movement *do* target individuals on the basis of nationality. Read our statement on this here (</blanket-boycotts.html>), and check out the following links to read just a few of the many examples of BDS activists targeting individual Israeli and Jewish musicians (<http://forward.com/opinion/319583/how-matisyahu-ban-backfired-on-bds-backers/>), filmmakers (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/19/movies/festival-in-oslo-rejects-film-by-roy-zafarani-citing-cultural-boycott-of-israel.html?_r=1), athletes (<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=17731>), chess masters (<http://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/Iranian-chess-master-expelled-for-refusing-to-play-Israeli>), artists (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-booted-from-banksys-dismaland-for-anti-israel-protest/>), academics (<http://www.thefacultylounge.org/2015/11/bds-developments.html>), and even school-children (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-horse-expert-defends-fair-snob-of-israeli-schoolgirl/>), even when these boycotted individuals' work is non-political (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-horse-expert-defends-fair-snob-of-israeli-schoolgirl/>) or only tangentially-related to Israel and Palestine (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2015/11/04/israeli-academic-shouted-down-in-lecture-at-university-of-minnesota/>). As academic workers, we, of all people, should oppose academic boycotts on principle. And with regard to solving the Israel-Palestine conflict, shutting down dialogue – particularly between highly-educated left-wing and right-wing Israelis and Palestinians – will only make things worse. If people can't talk with each other, then they cannot build bonds and mutual understandings and work together towards peace. On the contrary, policing sharp boundaries among Israeli, Palestinian, and global academics will only reinforce negative stereotypes and hateful prejudice, as there will be no room for dialogue to counteract these prejudices, thereby making things even worse than they already are.
5. BDS calls for a blanket boycott of all co-existence projects between Israelis and Palestinians, on the principle that co-existence should not be normalized. This completely undermines a grassroots peace process. Change cannot happen at a purely top-down, bureaucratic level: just because the Prime Minister says there

should be peace does not mean there will be. Far more important is the grassroots level: Israelis and Palestinians must learn to talk with each other, to work together, and to engage each other as friends and peers if there is any hope of achieving peace. Otherwise, they will not be able or willing, as a society, to heed their leaders' calls for peace.

6. There are many other (left-wing) projects aimed at bringing peace among Israelis and Palestinians. For example, Third Narrative (<http://thirdnarrative.org/issues/bds-does-not-equal-peace-articles/>) and JStreet (<http://jstreet.org/policy/pages/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions-bds>) both explicitly reject BDS, while just as explicitly criticizing and combatting Israeli oppression of Palestinians. Here is a long list of Arab-Israeli coexistence projects (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab-Israeli_peace_projects), which are aimed at developing peace on a grassroots level between individuals and communities.

2. Procedural reasons

1. The referendum differs significantly from the petition that triggered it. According to union bylaws, a petition must be signed by at least 10% of our union membership in order to trigger a vote on an official referendum. This is to ensure that the referendum has substantial support from our members before approving it for a larger vote. However, the referendum text includes two extreme demands that were not in the petition: for NYU to shut down its Tel Aviv campus, and for both NYU and our union to engage in an academic boycott of Israel. At the Assembly of Stewards meeting in April, our elected union leaders debated for over an hour the validity of the referendum text, given these discrepancies. Concerns were raised that we are being asked to vote on extreme demands that the petition signators didn't know they were supporting. This is a significant procedural issue that calls into question not only the referendum's validity but also its democratic nature.
2. When deciding whether or not to approve the referendum text for a vote, our elected officials faced a significant conflict of interest. After an hour of debate, they approved the referendum with a 10-4 vote. Not only were all 10 of the stewards who voted 'yes' public supporters of BDS, but many of them had been actively campaigning for BDS at NYU for over 6 months. In other words, they voted to approve their own referendum text, which they had brought to themselves for approval, after campaigning for BDS for over half a year. Furthermore, every steward present at the meeting who had *not* publicly supported BDS voted against approving the referendum. It is therefore questionable whether the referendum text was objectively approved, and this is a significant procedural problem.
3. The referendum text is incredibly vague and does not indicate a clear end date to the boycott. As noted in our public critique (</referendum-critique.html>), it does not define which geographic region "occupation" refers to (the West Bank? 1967 borders? All of Israel?), nor does it explain what actions would constitute "ending" the occupation (demilitarization, but Israelis can still live there? Evacuation of all Israeli citizens? Evacuation of all Jews?) The referendum's authors have adamantly refused every request to clarify these important terms of the boycott. Procedurally, it is problematic to endorse a boycott that has no clear end, particularly when the referendum's authors have adamantly refused every request for clarification.

3. Strategic reasons

1. We are just finishing the first year of our union contract – a crucial year in which we should be throwing all of our efforts into fighting for historic victories at NYU: victories in job security, pay increases, family support, health care, accessibility, anti-discrimination, transparency, and more. Campaigning for BDS has been a distraction from the issues that drove our union into existence – particularly when it was the stewards themselves who were doing much of the BDS campaigning. While social justice campaigns are important, pushing a highly divisive and controversial campaign about international politics is not how we need to be spending our crucial first years as a newly-recognized and poorly-respected student union.
2. BDS is incredibly divisive, both within our graduate student union and within the NYU community at large. We have heard talk of people canceling their union memberships over this. Others have refused to *join* the union over this. We have gotten complaints from countless, angry students and alumni who feel that BDS activists have co-opted our union, transforming it from a venue for achieving critical worker rights into a manipulative tool for pushing through BDS. As we finish the very first year of our contract, it is imperative that we strengthen the unity of our membership – not inflame new divisions. BDS is undermining our ability to mobilize a powerful, unified membership.
3. Both the NYU administration (<http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2016/04/8596490/cuny-nyu-grapple-student-proposals-condemn-israel>) and our parent union, United Auto Workers (<http://forward.com/news/breaking-news/327480/uaw-strikes-down-local-uca-branches-bds-vote/>), have explicitly and repeatedly rejected BDS. If we endorse BDS, then we will be publicly antagonizing and rejecting the very university administration that we are trying to negotiate with on job-related issues, as well as the larger union that is both funding and legitimizing our work. This will significantly weaken our negotiating power as we fight for historic, job-related victories for NYU graduate student workers.