

## Why Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) is not the answer

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The University of Saskatchewan prides itself in supporting principles of diversity, equity, human dignity, and *manacihitowin* (mutual respect) by reflecting them back in our daily interactions and decisions. I am not a supporter of Israeli government policy in fact, I disagree with political views of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. However, I am Jewish, and I am distraught over the May 15 VOX editorial and the motions passed at the USFA Spring General Meeting on May 1 as they directly counter the inclusive UofS principles.

The VOX Editorial, "The BDS Movement and the Palestine-Israel War", written by Claire Card introduced the reader to a single view on the long-standing Israel-Hamas conflict (Card, 2024). Identification of the current conflict as the "Palestine-Israel War" and the "Israeli war on Gaza" implies Israel is at war with the Palestinian people or the residents of Gaza when Israel is in a war against Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist group that won the Palestinian legislative election on January 25, 2006, allowing them to assume administrative control of the Gaza strip and the West Bank on June 14, 2007. It was Hamas who instigated the massacre of 1139 Israelis (766 civilians and 373 security personnel) and the abduction of 253 Israelis and foreigners into Gaza on October 7, 2023. Therefore, to avoid overt bias, I would refer to the conflict as the "Israel-Hamas war".

Claire Card identifies "more than five

million Palestinian refugees displaced by the state of Israel since the time of establishment in 1948". Once again, this is highly debatable language. In reality, 700,000 to 750,000 Arab residents of Israel were permanently displaced after Arab countries including, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, (Trans)Jordan, and Egypt, invaded Israel in the War of Independence (November 1947-July 1949). These displaced people who, had they stayed, would have been included as Israeli citizens, were displaced not only because of violence or fear of physical removal, but because the Arab military forces instructed them to leave. The displaced residents went to the neighboring Arab countries for help. The response by the Arab countries was to place them in camps. To be clear, the Arab countries who started the war and encouraged people to abandon their homes refused to care for their Arab brothers. As a consequence, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949. The population has since grown to more than 5 million refugees, not because they were displaced but because UNRWA grants refugee status to descendants of those who fled during Israel's War of Independence, even if those descendants have established citizenship in a host country. This definition is unique to Palestinians as the United Nations High

Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) does not include people with citizenship in a host country among refugee numbers. (Davis Jr, 2024) (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 2024; Rasgon, 2018).

Genocide, the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying the nation or group (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024), is yet another accusation made by Clare Card. This is ironic as Israel was established after extreme and violent antisemitism culminating in the genocide of 6 million Jews across Europe in World War II. Israel became a refuge for Jews who survived the death camps and a home to the more than 850,000 Jews expelled from North African and Middle Eastern states following the War of Independence (Mifano, 2021). In contrast, Hamas, an organization whose charter calls for the annihilation of Israel and for the death of all Jews, jeopardizes thousands of Palestinians by firing missiles from schools and hospitals and overtly attempted genocide on October 7 when they broke the existing ceasefire, invading Israel (Milstein, 2024; Wilson Center, 2023).

Although not mentioned in the VOX editorial, I would like to add an additional term, Zionism, to this discussion. It has been heard in increasing in cadence among some groups who

equate the term to anti-Palestinian. Zionism is the movement for self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in Israel, their ancestral homeland (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia, 2024). Like any political vision there are extremists. There are revisionist Zionists who want to claim the West Bank for Israel and expel Palestinians and liberal Zionists who seek Jewish self-determination within a liberal democratic state. All nations have a right to self-determination and no country has offered statehood more often to those seeking to destroy it than Israel. The Palestinians could have had an independent state in 1947, 1948, 1967, 2000, 2001, 2005, and 2008 (Tishby, 2022). Using the word Zionist is not the same as saying anti-Palestine.

Finally, Claire Card compares Israel to South Africa as practicing apartheid against Palestinians. Israel is a different country with a different history and different issues than South Africa. In South Africa, the majority population was segregated, discriminated against, and denied the right to vote and participate in governance by the minority population. In contrast, Israel is the only democratic state in the region and is a multi-racial society. Although Jewish Israelis make up 80% of the population, all Israelis, Jewish, Arab, and other, receive equal protection under the law and participate in the political process. There are Arab parliamentarians, judges, cabinet ministers, university profes-

sors, diplomats, police and army officers. Discrimination on the basis of race or religion is a criminal offence. While Israel is identified as a “Jewish state”, that does not mean non-Jews don’t live there under the same laws and freedoms as Jewish Israelis (Sabel, 2011; Ellis, 2019).

The ideology that Israel is an apartheid state sparked the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement after the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 when the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) called on the international community “to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era”.

This 24-year-old campaign does not support constructive measures to build Israeli-Palestinian engagement, nor does it promote peace negotiations for a mutually negotiated two-state solution to the conflict. Instead, the BDS grasps onto the beliefs of the most radical revisionist Zionists and promotes a biased and simplistic approach to the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the fault of only one party – Israel; while ignoring any shared Palestinian responsibility for the continuation of the conflict.

In addition to the Vox editorial promoting BDS, the Faculty Association Motions put forward in support of

BDS were passed at the USFA Spring General Meeting on May 1. It is unfortunate that these motions were drafted without consultation of Jewish faculty, students, and/or staff. Those who put forward the motion have known Jewish faculty within their department, yet they chose not to consult them on something that has a very real possibility of affecting the safety and well-being of Jews on campus and beyond. Further, although technically, quorum was achieved, as defined by the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association Regulation, the vote involved less than 10% of the approximately 1100 UofS faculty members (University of Saskatchewan, 2024) for an issue that will likely divide as opposed to unite people.

The 24-year-old BDS movement has not created peace, as it proposes, nor has it crushed Israel economically. But BDS, wherever it has been introduced on campuses, has created division and conflict, usually followed by an uptick in antisemitic incidents, both on campus and more broadly (ADL, 2024; JTA, 2016; Cohen, 2024). So..... the real question is, why support a proposal that has almost no chance of moving the scales, ending the violence, and achieving peace, which we all want, if the consequence of the proposal is a higher likelihood of worsening the situation locally, especially for Jewish faculty, students, staff, and those in the Saskatoon community at large?

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