

Boycott, Divest, Sanction¹

Citing security concerns, in the early 2000s Israel began to build a wall across the occupied territories of the West Bank, effectively isolating and restricting the movement of 25,000 Palestinians to and from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations (UN) condemned the barrier as a violation of international law. While the ICJ recognized Israel's duty to protect itself from violence against its civilian population, the court urged Israel to dismantle the portions of the barrier erected on the West Bank. According to reports, the civilian population in the occupied territories has been cut off from land and resources needed for Palestinian development.

According to Human Rights Watch, the barrier not only has resulted in the expropriation and destruction of fertile Palestinian farmland, but also has prevented Palestinians from accessing work, education, and medical facilities.² The case of Fuad Jado outlines how challenging receiving emergency medical services can be, as ambulances need to coordinate with Israeli authorities in order to gain authorization to cross into Jerusalem.³ When Jado's mother suffered a heart attack, he was advised by authorities instead to try to bring his mother to the hospital himself. Fuad and his nephew carried Fuad's mother 300 meters over difficult terrain but she passed away just as they reached the fence.⁴ Moreover, ever since the wall was built, illegal Israeli settlements have grown at a rapid pace.

In response to Israel's policies, Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called for international campaigners to treat Israel as they treated apartheid South Africa.⁵ The BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) movement against the alleged Israeli apartheid has garnered support around the world, on college campuses, and even within Jewish groups, like Jewish Voice for Peace. According to Rebecca Vilkomerson, the executive director of Jewish Voice for Peace, the BDS movement "is a call for solidarity from the international community until Israel complies with international law and ends its violations of Palestinian rights."⁶ The BDS movement has many prominent supporters, including Angela Davis, Roger Waters, and Thurston Moore. However, the BDS movement has encountered staunch opposition within the U.S. political establishment, with 22 states having "introduced or passed anti-BDS legislation...[that] makes it illegal for states to do business with companies that support BDS."⁷ Calling BDS "a smear campaign designed to delegitimize the state of Israel and inflict severe economic damage,"⁸ New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order that requires his state to create and publish a list of institutions and companies that support BDS. Even presidential candidate Hillary Clinton lambasted her church, the United Methodist Church, for supporting BDS, suggesting that the movement was anti-Semitic.⁹ According to American jurist Allan Dershowitz, the BDS movement is counterproductive and immoral, for it "imposes the entire blame for the continuing Israeli occupation and settlement policy on the Israelis."¹⁰

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the moral responsibilities of American politicians to weigh in on Israel and Palestine, whether formally or informally?
2. What are the most morally salient consequences of boycotting, in this case? What do you think about the moral efficacy of boycotting in general?
3. What are the moral responsibilities of citizens of other countries in acting out for or against the BDS movement, if any?

¹ Thank you to the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl for allowing us to modify one of their cases for use here! For more information about the IEB, please visit: <https://appe-ethics.org/ethics-bowl/>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2003/09/30/israel-west-bank-barrier-endangers-basic-rights>

³ <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4844327>

⁴ <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4844327>

⁵ <https://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Desmond-Tutu-Israel-guilty-of-apartheid-in-treatment-of-Palestinians-344874>

⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/24/im-jewish-and-i-want-people-to-boycott-israel/?utm_term=.163db19d185f

⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/24/im-jewish-and-i-want-people-to-boycott-israel/?utm_term=.163db19d185f

⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/gov-andrew-cuomo-if-you-boycott-israel-new-york-state-will-boycott-you/2016/06/10/1d6d3acc-2e62-11e6-9b37-42985f6a265c_story.html?utm_term=.957e29f490b7

⁹ <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/rania-khalek/hillary-clinton-attacks-her-church-over-israel-divestment-vote>

¹⁰ <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.573880>

