

# BDS

## BRIEFING CARD

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement started in 2005. It is inspired by the movement that helped end apartheid in South Africa.

The BDS movement is led by Palestinians. It encourages individuals, businesses and governments across the world to take peaceful democratic measures against Israel for its ongoing violations of international law.

BDS is a democratic and peaceful way to support basic Palestinian human rights.

- **'Boycotting'** is using personal choice not to use or buy something from a company involved in Israel's illegal occupation.
- **'Divestment'** is withdrawing investment from companies involved in Israel.
- **'Sanctions'** calls on governments to cut political and economic ties with Israel until it stops breaking international law.



London: FOA activists

BDS pressures Israel to comply with international law. It has already helped bring global attention to Israel's apartheid regime and illegal occupation of Palestine.

In 2022 we saw the power of boycott, divestment and sanctions when it came to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We can use BDS to do the same with Israel.

- BDS stands for **Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions**.
- BDS is a Palestinian-led movement calling on individuals, businesses and governments to boycott Israel until it **stops violating Palestinian human rights and breaking international law**.



## BDS under attack in the UK

The British government (2023) is proposing to pass legislation that **bans public bodies** like Councils and Universities **from boycotting or divesting from Israel**. The anti-BDS bill [Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill] is part of the government's wide-ranging attack on human rights activists, including the Policing and Borders Bill and anti-strike legislation.

The anti-BDS bill contradicts the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights published by the United Nations<sup>1</sup>. Both the UN Guiding Principles and an Action Plan to implement them published by the UK Government<sup>2</sup> make clear that businesses have a corporate responsibility to uphold human rights. The government's own risk advice to businesses on trading with Israeli settlements states that: "Settlements are illegal under international law ... [there are] clear risks related to economic and financial activities [there], and we do not encourage or offer support to such activity."<sup>3</sup>

The anti-BDS bill penalises public bodies complying with the UK's responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and **takes away the democratic right** of public bodies to make ethical financial decisions. It forces them to financially engage with Israel, which has been violating international laws, UN Resolutions, Geneva Conventions and continues with colonialism.

The anti-BDS bill vest power to Ministers in exempting countries from the provisions of the Bill. However, it explicitly precludes Ministers from making any exemption in respect of Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or the Golan Heights. Thus, uniquely shielding human rights abuses by Israel.

The anti-BDS bill also has a chilling effect on civil society, who are likely to be labelled as anti-Semites for upholding justice and peace. At a time when Israel has intensified its attacks on Palestinians, with the Israeli Newspaper Haaretz [19 March 2023] calling the violence 'Pogroms', the anti-BDS bill provides a shield for Israel to continue with the violations.

## Protect the democratic rights to Boycott?

Despite the government proposed anti-BDS bill, which will provide impunity to Israel with its colonisation, the campaign to challenge it must continue.

**Parliament must be lobbied.** Campaigners are also encouraged to request public bodies boycott Israeli companies, even if the bill passes and challenge the anti-BDS bill in the Court of Law.

The anti-BDS bill will take away public bodies' right to make ethical and moral decisions. Public bodies must have the right not financially to engage with companies and countries violating human rights.

At an individual level, it is essential to continue promoting and participating in BDS. To defend the democratic rights of making ethical decisions, we encourage public figures (social, entertainment, sport, academic and political) to announce their support for BDS.



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### References:

- 1) [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr_en.pdf)
- 2) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-un-guiding-principles-on-business-and-human-rights-may-2020-update>
- 3) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-business-risk-palestinian-territories/overseas-business-risk-the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

