



**State of Israel**  
Ministry of Strategic Affairs  
and Public Diplomacy



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# Behind the Mask

The Antisemitic Nature of BDS Exposed

September 2019

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hiding behind the mask of advancing Palestinian human and civil rights, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, led by the Ramallah-based BDS National Committee, is engaged in an ongoing campaign of delegitimization against Israel, which includes the use of antisemitic rhetoric and images.

The BDS movement is a global campaign that aims to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel through a relentless attack on it within Western civic society. It is not engaged in legitimate criticism to promote political change or advance peace, rather its ultimate goal is to bring about the dissolution of the State of Israel. For its part, the State of Israel values and guarantees freedom of expression and assembly and is home to a diverse and robust political discourse.

This report is the product of a comprehensive review of open-source content of leading BDS activists and organizations that highlights their use of antisemitic tropes and motifs. The report was prepared by The Ministry of Strategic Affairs, which is responsible for coordinating the Government of Israel's response to delegitimization and the boycott campaign. The report is part of an ongoing effort by the Ministry to better understand and expose the strategy and methods of the BDS movement and the leading activists who run it. Earlier this year, the Ministry has revealed the deep links between designated terrorist organizations, in particular Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and key activists in BDS-promoting organizations.

This report documents some 80 examples in which leading BDS activists or organizations disseminated content that qualifies as antisemitic based on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism. This internationally accepted definition was formulated and unanimously approved in 2016 and has since been formally adopted by 15 countries and the European Union. The examples cited in this report are divided into three main sections: expressions of classic antisemitism; Holocaust inversion; and denial of the Jewish people's right to self-determination – all forms of antisemitism under the IHRA Working Definition.

The report also cites statements by Western leaders and officials, noting the connection between the BDS movement and antisemitism and highlights the watershed resolution passed in the German parliament, branding the argumentation patterns and methods of the BDS movement as antisemitic.

The report's main findings point to the following relation between the BDS movement and antisemitic discourse:

- the relentless delegitimization and demonization of the State of Israel by the BDS movement invariably results in the stigmatizing of Jews worldwide and in Israel;
- some members of the BDS movement leadership spread content or make statements which are antisemitic, including key members of the BDS National Committee (BNC), that sets the worldwide agenda and tone of the boycott campaign against Israel;
- the argumentation patterns and methods of the BDS movement are antisemitic, such as denying the right of Jews to self-determination in their ancestral homeland and singling out the Jewish State for boycott.
- The BDS leadership's adamant and unequivocal denial of the Jewish people's right to self-determination in Israel, within any borders, is an expression of antisemitism. Omar Barghouti, BDS co-founder and leader, has repeatedly declared "definitely we oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine."

The report further shows how, under the guise of legitimate political criticism, the BDS movement has been able to use antisemitic tropes and motifs relating to Israel with impunity, and that, as a result, the West has become desensitized to antisemitic discourse when it appears in an anti-Israel context.

This report aims to show that, through its campaign to delegitimize Israel, which, as documented here, includes Israel-focused antisemitic rhetoric, the BDS movement is an important contributor to contemporary antisemitism. Furthermore, the extremist worldview of the BDS movement leadership trickles down to rank and file activists who adopt antisemitic discourse.

This, at a time when antisemitism, in all its forms, is rising dangerously, and when there is growing concern over evidence which shows that, if left unchecked over time, hate speech and stigmatization can be a catalyst to physical violence.

The following are examples of antisemitic content disseminated by leading BDS activists and organizations:



A Facebook post by a branch of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the leading BDS organization in the UK, showing, over the caption, "Sowing the Promised Land," a demonic skull-capped Jew sowing a field with grenades rather than seeds.



Salah Khawaja, a member of the secretariat of the BDS National Committee (BNC), posted on his Facebook page this image of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, outsized, flanked by ultra-Orthodox Jews, wielding a bloody butcher's ax and wearing a bloody apron as he confronts stone-throwing Palestinians.



Sana Daoud, who served as national board member of American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), posted the image above on Facebook, depicting the erasing the Jewish people / Jewish state, symbolized by the Star of David.



This caricature, of a bearded Jew holding a bloody pitchfork and new keys to homes, standing on a 1948 war monument atop dead Palestinian children and scattered skulls, won second place and a cash prize in an illustration contest by the BDS-promoting organization, BADIL.

In view of the findings of the report, the State of Israel calls on governments and international and national institutions:

- to be vigilant for statements made by BDS organizations and activists that may be consistent with the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism and to take appropriate action against them;
- to follow the lead of the German parliament, and to expose the connection between the BDS movement and antisemitism, underscoring that the delegitimization and demonization of the State of Israel invariably leads to stigmatization and increased antisemitism against Jews as individuals;
- to end funding to NGOs that promote BDS or that publish content that is antisemitic;
- to call on financial platforms not to provide services to BDS organizations that publish antisemitic content or that have links to terror;
- to demand that social media platforms remove antisemitic BDS content.

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# A 3D TEST FOR BDS

**The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement employs the time-tested tools of antisemitism to seek the elimination of the Jewish State**

By Natan Sharansky



Although many who support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement may do so out of a naive belief that it is working to achieve a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the truth is that BDS has but one goal: the destruction of the State of Israel.

That goal however is masked cleverly behind the veneer of fighting for human rights and legitimate criticism of Israel.

Almost 20 years ago at the beginning of the 2000s, amid a global resurgence of antisemitic violence, in particular in Europe, while serving as the Minister for Diaspora Affairs, I came up with what I call the 3D test to distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism.

The three Ds are demonization, delegitimization and double standards.

These are the three most important tools that antisemites employed against Jews throughout history.

For thousands of years, Jews were demonized, they were charged with blood libels, with poisoning wells, and, later, with controlling the global banking system.

There were periods in history when the Jewish faith was delegitimized and the Jewish claim to nationhood was denied.

Double standards were applied to Jews, either through the imposition of special laws – from the Middle Ages in Europe, to the Russian Empire and Nazi Germany – or through de facto government policy discriminating against Jews as in the Soviet Union.

Throughout history, demonization of Jewish people, delegitimization of their faith or nationhood, and double standards applied to Jews created fertile soil for pogroms, expulsions and genocide.

My 3D test shows that if we see the same tools of delegitimization, demonization and double standards that were used against Jews in the past being used today against the collective Jew, the Jewish State – we know we are witnessing a new face of the old antisemitism.

When caricatures against Israeli leaders repeat the worst antisemitic caricatures of Czarist Russia or Nazi Germany, and this time it is Israelis who are crucifying Palestinians or making ritual use of their blood, and when Palestinians are portrayed as living in Nazi death camps– that is demonization, that is the blood libel of today, that is antisemitism.

When the legitimacy of the Jewish State is denied and, in the language of the founders of BDS, there is no place for a Jewish state in the Middle East in any borders – that is delegitimization, that is antisemitism.

And when the Jewish State is singled out for criticism that not even the vilest dictatorship is subject to and it is held to standards that not even the most vibrant democracy is judged by – those are double standards, and that is antisemitism.

There is always place for criticism of Israel, as there is for criticism of any other free society. But it must not cross the line of antisemitism. When people talk about Israel, we have to identify whether these three elements of delegitimization, demonization and double standards apply and whether that criticism is tainted with antisemitism or not.

In the same way that when we watch a 3D movie without special 3D glasses, we cannot see the full picture, when we put on our 3D glasses everything becomes clear. This report, thanks to its thorough research, provides the reader, example after example, with 3D glasses through which they can see how the leaders of BDS have, from the very beginning, crossed the line from legitimate criticism to outright antisemitism.

Just as the antisemites of yesteryear sought to prepare the ground for the expulsion and murder of Jews, the leaders of the BDS movement seek to use the ancient tools of demonization, delegitimization and double standards to put in place the foundations for a world without Israel.

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The movement seeks to bring the level of hatred against Israel today to the level of hatred against Jews in the past, to delegitimize the Jewish state to the point where it is seen by the world as a cancer that should be removed.

It is the same approach that created the atmosphere that led to the Holocaust.

From the outset, the idea behind BDS and the aim of its leaders has been the destruction of Israel. The movement's co-founder and leader Omar Barghouti has said so unequivocally: "Definitely, most definitely we oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine."

It is our job not just to expose the BDS leadership for what it is, but also to educate those who naively serve its purpose.

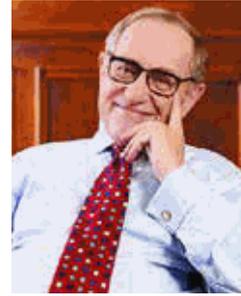
Those who want a better world shouldn't give a hand to those whose aim is to see a world without Israel. We have to think together how to improve the world, not help those who wish to rid the world of Jews.

*Natan Sharansky is a former Prisoner of Zion who spent nine years in Soviet jails. He was Israel's Minister for Diaspora Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister. He served as Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel and was recently named as Chair of The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy.*

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## **BDS Discrimination is Not Freedom of Speech**

By Alan Dershowitz



For years, I have been making the case against the notorious and discriminatory Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign. I did so out of my conviction that BDS violated core principles of human rights, harmed the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict, and promoted antisemitism by singling out Israel for condemnation as the worst offender in the international community. I have claimed that it is essentially a 21st century version of the blood libel against the nation state of the Jewish people.

Three years ago, the international community came to an important consensus on defining antisemitism – in the form of the IHRA Working Definition. Since then, 15 countries and the EU have formally adopted the definition. The United States also uses the definition. The IHRA Working Definition does not curtail criticism of Israel. It does not silence anybody. What it does is to identify speech that may be antisemitic, just as racists and other forms of bigoted speech have been identified and condemned in the marketplace of ideas.

BDS is an antisemitic tactic directed only against Jewish citizens and supporters of Israel. Its purported protest is not against Israeli policies but a protest against Israel's very existence. It has nothing in common with a grassroots protest campaign, because it is led by a small number of extremely well-funded and closely coordinated organizations, who together decide on strategies and tactics – hiding behind a façade of promoting international law and human rights.

If one looks at the foundation documents of the BDS campaign, one will realize that it reeks of bigotry. First, it calls to end the so-called “colonization of all Arab lands,” denying the Jewish people any right to self-determination in their historic homeland. Second, calling for a return of all Palestinian refugees including descendants and other relatives to their “homes” and properties in reference to UN Resolution 194, would in fact mean, the end of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

As shown in this report, many leaders of Palestinian organizations created under the guise of promoting human rights and for the purpose of strengthening the idea of an “active Palestinian civil-society” have disseminated and endorsed antisemitic rhetoric and motifs. The relentless delegitimization and demonization of

the Jewish State directly or indirectly contributes to the stigmatization against Jews as individuals.

I myself have been subject to several antisemitic caricatures published by supporters of the BDS campaign. Moreover, the founder of BDS refused an invitation from the Oxford Union to debate me, on the grounds that I – a non-Israeli Zionist – am subject to the boycott.

It never ends with words. Incitement and violent speech often lead to action. If antisemitism had only been confined throughout history to words and speech only, it would have been a problem of much smaller magnitude. History is proof that bigoted words lead to lethal actions.

As a professor of law and criminal defense attorney, I know how to protect myself from such bigots. However, intimidation and harassment of students who speak on behalf of Israel has become a commonplace on university campuses around the world. Much effort is needed to ensure that those who publicly take a stand in favor of the world's only Jewish state, are protected from violence, intimidation and denial of their right to free speech.

Prohibiting acts of discrimination against Israelis, Zionists and Jews does not infringe freedom of speech. Bigots have the right to advocate such discrimination just as they have the right to advocate discrimination against Blacks, Muslims, women, gays and other groups. But they do not have the right to practice or engage in such discrimination.

This year, the German Parliament took a significant decision with its resolution on antisemitism. Not only did the Bundestag refer to the special historic responsibility of Germany towards Israel but it also highlighted the antisemitic arguments and methods used by the BDS campaign. The Bundestag was absolutely right in its perception that calling for a boycott of Jewish businesses or artists remind us all of the most terrible phase of German history and inevitable kindle memories of the Nazi parole "Do not buy from Jews."

My experience has taught me that if governments take the fight against antisemitism seriously – as so many governments have said they do – they need to confront the BDS campaign, hold it accountable for violation of anti-discrimination laws and policies, and expose its antisemitic agenda.

As someone who has held sacred the right to freedom of expression and assembly all of my life, it is important to say: Discrimination based antisemitism is not an exercise of free speech. It is an offense. And it should concern every person of good will.

*Alan Dershowitz is Professor of Law Emeritus at Harvard Law School*



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For centuries Jews were persecuted for their faith. Stigmatization and demonization of Jews led to violence, pogroms and ultimately the Holocaust. With the establishment of the State of Israel, a new form of antisemitism arose, where hatred of the Jew was replaced by hatred of the Jewish State.

At the forefront of the delegitimization and demonization of the State of Israel in the West today is the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. Under the banner of human rights and the guise of legitimate political criticism, the BDS movement has relentlessly attacked Israel, including through the use of antisemitic rhetoric. This report showcases some 80 examples of leading BDS activists and organizations using antisemitic tropes and motifs.

As Natan Sharansky notes in the foreword to this report, "if we see the same tools of delegitimization, demonization and double standards that were used against Jews in the past being used today against the collective Jew, the Jewish State – we know we are witnessing a new face of the old antisemitism."

**This report makes clear the need for Western governments and civic leaders to remain vigilant against antisemitism in all its forms, including that practiced by the BDS movement, and to take proactive steps to stem this hate.**

**#UNMASKBDS**