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What Palestinians Ask of Us

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement

An interview with Omar Barghouti by Sumaya Awad & brian bean

In 2005 more than 170 organizations of Palestinian civil society put out a call to action for people around the globe to boycott, divest from, and sanction (BDS) the state of Israel. Inspired by the struggle against South African apartheid, and drawing on a long tradition of boycotts within Palestine, the BDS call was issued by a representative coalition of organizations both in historical Palestine and in exile. Focusing on a rights-based framework and appealing to international law, the call focuses on achieving three core demands placed on Israel:

1. *Ending the occupation and colonization of all Arab lands stolen in the Nakba and dismantling the Apartheid Wall.*

2. *Recognizing the fundamental rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.*

3. *Respecting, promoting, and protecting the rights of Palestinian refugees, including their right to return to their homes and properties as stipulated by United Nations Resolution 194.*

*Many individuals, unions, campus groups, churches, artists, academics, socialist groups, political parties, and others have since taken up this Palestinian-led call and engaged in local activism around BDS through a myriad of ways to target the Israeli state and corporations that profit from the occupation. This call has become a true international movement that has galvanized the struggle for Palestine around the world. In this interview we talk with Omar Barghouti, a cofounder of BDS, about the current movement. For more introductory information on BDS, see the comprehensive website bdsmovement.net and Barghouti’s indispensable book *Boycott, Divestment Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*.*

Since 2008 we have seen in the United States a deep radicalization expressed, developed, and deepened by the Occupy movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, the opening around socialism of the first Sanders campaign, and the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, among other expressions. Why is it essential that this new socialist radicalization and new layer of radical activists squarely take up the question of Palestine and BDS specifically? Why BDS, and why now?

Omar Barghouti: For too long many US progressives have willfully excluded Palestine from the spectrum of justice struggles that they supported, earning the label “Progressive Except Palestine,” or PEP. By “progressive” in the US, I mean a broad term with no clear definition. It has been appropriated and abused at times by neoliberals like Hillary Clinton and her like. But as

I understand it, it includes standing for social, racial, and economic justice, especially respect, recognition, and institutionalization of the rights of women, people of color, indigenous people, LGBTQI people, and support for climate justice. The exclusion of Palestine was due to several factors, most important of which is the strong influence of Zionists and the weakness of pro-Palestine voices among progressive movements. Supporting justice for Palestinians entailed paying a heavy political or financial price, as many activists and groups in the US had learned the hard way.

But in the last few years, especially with the growing appeal of socialism and social democracy and the rising impact of the BDS Movement for Palestinian rights, things have changed significantly, perhaps nearing a tipping point among progressives. PEP is giving way to PIP—Progressive *Including* Palestine, as Israel and Zionism are becoming increasingly associated with the far right, white supremacy, and even fascist tendencies in the US, Europe, India, Latin America, the Philippines and elsewhere, particularly in the Trump era, where masks are falling.

In contrast, BDS has become an inseparable and organic part of the global progressive, anti-fascist wave. It is important to include justice and self-determination for Palestinians in progressive agendas not only because standing with the oppressed in their struggle against oppression, as was the case in fighting apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow in the US South, is part of the definition of being progressive. It is also a profound moral obligation to do no harm, to strive to end one's complicity in maintaining oppressive regimes.

The fact that boundless and unconditional US financial, military, diplomatic, academic, and political support is the main reason why Israel's regime of military occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid can continue to deny Palestinian rights triggers the fundamental ethical obligation for US citizens, progressives in particular, to pressure US institutions, elected officials, and government to end this complicity.

With Trump's unprecedented partnership in entrenching and defending its crimes, Israel has intensified its genocidal policies¹ to bury Palestinian rights and to disappear Palestinians as a people and as a liberation cause. Israel's twelve-year-old siege of two million Palestinians in Gaza, for instance, has made the Strip "unlivable," according to the UN, reducing it to a slow-death camp, where water is unfit for human consumption, food is scarce, health services are near collapse, and the general possibility of sustenance is elusive.² This should alarm all humans, especially progressives in the US, as their elected government shares a major part of the responsibility for the crimes against humanity that Israel is perpetrating against Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere.

As we approach the fifteenth anniversary of the 2005 call for BDS from Palestinian civil society organizations, we have seen a marked change in sympathy with the cause for Palestine. In the United States, opinion polls reflect a slow but significant shift, especially among young people, in being more critical of Israeli apartheid. A number of large Protestant churches have adopted BDS measures. High-profile musicians have heeded the call for cultural boycott and canceled concerts in Israel. We also have seen the election of a small group of women socialist Congress members who have voiced criticisms of Israel's actions at a higher degree than has been seen before. The BDS Movement obviously has

played a central role in this transformation. Can you talk about that role and what it says about BDS, where it is, and where it needs to go?

With its universal and intersectional approach to human rights, its antiracist platform, and support by many progressives, BDS has succeeded in integrating the struggle for Palestinian freedom, justice, and equality in the middle of the progressive agenda.

As Israel and its lobby groups are realizing, Israel's steady shift to the far right over the last decade has led to not just strengthening progressive support for BDS but also alienating the liberal mainstream. Jewish millennials in the US are increasingly supporting justice for the Palestinian people, including through BDS tactics.

Trump's embrace of Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right government and the fact that Israel's apartheid and colonial policies have become models emulated by the Trump administration in implementing its anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic agenda have led to a tipping point for our struggle. For the first time ever, it has become acceptable, albeit still very controversial, in Congress to call for BDS against Israel to bring about its compliance with international law, and it has become perfectly legitimate in the mainstream to advocate BDS tactics to achieve Palestinian liberation.³ Of those in the Democratic Party who have heard of BDS, almost half support the movement, as a recent University of Maryland poll shows.⁴

The growing intersectional partnership between the struggle for Palestinian rights and the struggles for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTQ, gender and climate justice, and the growing support from Jewish progressives for Palestinian liberation have led to significant traction for BDS across the US. Dozens of student governments on campuses, large and small, have adopted divestment or other BDS measures against corporations implicated in Israel's grave human rights violations. More mainline churches than ever are adopting divestment and calling for cutting US military aid to Israel. More artists and academics are refusing to lend their names to Israel's apartheid and colonial regime. Some US labor unions as well are courageously adopting BDS, despite the massive backlash from union leadership.⁵

The challenge for BDS now is to effectively translate this growing grassroots support into policy change at the local, state, and eventually federal level, as was done in the struggle against South African apartheid. The Deadly Exchange campaign led by Jewish Voice for Peace, a key BDS partner in the US, is an inspiring example of a BDS campaign that seeks a gradual policy shift. It targets exchange programs between US police forces and their Israeli counterparts by exposing how their partnership is not only entrenching Israeli apartheid and criminal oppression of Palestinians but also exacerbating the racism, militarism, and extreme brutality of US police forces.

The flip side to these developments is the fierce reaction to BDS internationally and in the US especially. From Germany's federal level anti-BDS resolution to the largely symbolic but still frightening US federal legislation, like HR246 that mentioned you by name, to the thirty-plus similar bills being pushed on the state level, there is pushback. These endeavors, alongside moves to counter BDS activism on campus, are receiving backing and funding from the Israeli state. In some ways the amount of energy that Israel is spending to try to

affect activism on college campuses and by pop stars reflects how effective BDS is. How can we counter this reaction?

Israel and its lobby groups are investing hundreds of millions of dollars and massive political, academic, cultural, and other assets in fighting BDS because they realize that with its mask off, Israel's regime of oppression is losing grassroots and civil society support worldwide. BDS is inspiring millions to translate that into effective measures to isolate this regime in all fields, in support of Palestinian rights under international law.

While Israel is drunk with power and celebrating its relative success in passing anti-BDS legislation or resolutions in twenty-seven states across the US, in the German Bundestag, and elsewhere, it is missing the growing undercurrent of resentment and apprehension that its McCarthyite tactics are creating. Three federal courts have already frozen the respective anti-BDS legislation of the states of Kansas, Texas, and Arizona, citing their incompatibility with the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which is playing a decisive role in exposing the unconstitutionality of Israel's legal warfare, or lawfare, against BDS, has condemned anti-BDS legislation as "reminiscent of McCarthy-era loyalty oaths."⁶ A recent poll shows that 72 percent of all Americans "oppose laws that penalize people who boycott Israel because these laws infringe on the Constitutional right to free speech and peaceful protest."⁷

As part of its lawfare on BDS, and after failing to inhibit the impressive growth of the movement and its global impact, Israel, with its lobby groups, has been aggressively pushing a new, fraudulent definition of "antisemitism" that is designed to delegitimize the struggle for Palestinian rights and to shield Israel from accountability to international law.

In 2018, more than forty international Jewish groups, including the influential Jewish Voice for Peace in the US, condemned the conflation between "legitimate criticisms of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism, as a means to suppress the former." Their statement said, "This conflation undermines both the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality and the global struggle against antisemitism. It also serves to shield Israel from being held accountable to universal standards of human rights and international law."⁸

Condemnation for the Bundestag's adoption of this definition as a basis for its anti-Palestinian, anti-BDS resolution came not just from Palestinian society but also from many human rights groups and leading intellectuals worldwide.⁹ More than 240 Jewish and Israeli scholars, including authorities on antisemitism and history of the Holocaust, for instance, issued a statement accusing the "deceitful" resolution of doing nothing to "advance the urgent fight against anti-Semitism" and of ignoring the BDS movement's explicit condemnation of "all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism."¹⁰

Daniel Blatman, a prominent Israeli Holocaust era historian and chief historian of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum, was even more blunt. He wrote:

That is how a country where anti-Semitism was a political tool that contributed to the rise of the Nazis' murderous enterprise became a country that promotes distortion of anti-Semitism as a tool

to facilitate the political persecution of a nonviolent [BDS] movement that fights the occupation, the oppression of the Palestinians and the war crimes Israel perpetrates in the territories.¹¹

Countering Israel's lawfare requires exposing its far-right agenda and the toxic influence of its militarization-securitization model around the world, from India to Chile, and from Europe to the US, as well as further strengthening intersectional struggles that integrate Palestinian rights in progressive agendas.

In 2018 Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar were elected to Congress. Tlaib, a Palestinian-American, and Omar, a Somali refugee, have both defied the status quo narrative on Palestine in Congress by openly criticizing US funding of Israel's apartheid regime and US imperialism's reliance on Israel. Their positions are very atypical for candidates within the Democratic Party in particular. In the lead-up to the 2020 elections we saw a leftward shift the US hasn't witnessed in decades. Candidates like Bernie Sanders have openly claimed they will consider cutting funds to Israel, following Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib's rejection of entry by Israel for their delegation to Palestine. Can you comment on this?

For some time now this shift in the Democratic Party has been happening, and there are key indicators. In a 2018 Brookings Institute poll, for instance, 56 percent support imposing "sanctions or more serious measures" on Israel if it continued to build illegal settlements, and 64 percent of all Americans "support a single democratic state in which Arabs and Jews are equal even if that means Israel would no longer be a politically Jewish state."¹²

US military aid to Israel with time has steadily been shifting from being justifiable in terms of US "national security," which translates into serving the interests of the 1 percent, to almost becoming an article of faith for US elected officials and lawmakers who do not dare to question it.¹³ The fact that the evangelical Christian Zionist lobby and the white supremacist tendency in the US have grown considerably in the last decade may offer part of the explanation for this phenomenon, as the intimidation and bullying pressures that Israel lobby groups put on elected officials who dare to question unconditional aid to Israel have become virtually unbearable. But even that taboo is being shattered. Conditioning aid to Israel on its respect for some Palestinian rights has become far less taboo in the Democratic Party quite rapidly of late.¹⁴

Of course Israel still serves the interest of the US establishment, particularly the military-security industry, which stands to gain from Israel's habitual wars waged against the Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, and others, testing the latest US weaponry and contributing to the US war economy. The fact that most of the US military aid to Israel goes back to this military-security industry in the US underlines this factor.

As I have written elsewhere, Israel's lobby in Washington is recognized today, as a 2015 right-wing poll shows, by three out of four "opinion elites" in the Democratic Party as wielding "too much influence" on US foreign policy.¹⁵ Whether one argues that the tail is wagging the imperial dog or the other way around, one cannot but accept that the tail and the dog are organically connected! US imperial interests and Israel's massive influence go hand in hand.

But reflecting the swelling grassroots support for holding Israel to account over its crimes against the Palestinian people, more ranking politicians, including key Democratic presidential nominees, are now ready to advocate for leveraging US aid to Israel to bring about its at least partial compliance with international law. This shift in US public opinion is due to several factors, including many years of hard work by Palestine solidarity activists in progressive circles, Israel's steady shift to the far right and its inability to maintain the worn-out mask of liberalism, and Israel's embrace of white supremacists, xenophobes and even fascist forces in the US, Europe, and elsewhere despite their patently antisemitic positions, or what may be termed the "Trump effect."

The dramatic shift in young Jewish Americans' views of Israel and their growing support for Palestinian rights, including using BDS tactics, has also played an important role in this overall shift. It effectively undermined the weaponized use of the false antisemitism charge by Israel and its lobby groups to muzzle criticism of Israel and calls for imposing sanctions on it. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar's public endorsement of BDS and senators Sanders and Feinstein's public defense of the right to boycott Israel to achieve Palestinian rights must be seen in this light. After all, 72 percent of all Americans today oppose anti-BDS legislation.

One of the features of the radicalization is a general tendency toward a pro-solidarity politics. We see the usefulness of concepts like intersectionality on one hand and also the way in which the Trump presidency has in a sense centralized and connected struggles due to the many-pronged nature of his attacks. This has meant that many of the activists that we interact with stand generally in solidarity with Palestine. The question we often encounter—very much from a position of sympathy and solidarity—is, with so much injustice going on, *Why this? Why Palestine?* What do we say to the West Virginia teacher fighting against charter schools and environmental devastation, indigenous activists fighting dispossession and environmental devastation, folks who are trying to stop concentration camps at the border? When we talk about struggles being materially connected, how does Palestine figure in and help inform a strategy and program for shared struggle?

Palestinian rights are seen today by much of the world as the "litmus test for human rights," as described by John Dugard, prominent South African jurist and former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights.¹⁶ This means that oppressed communities worldwide increasingly recognize international complicity in maintaining Israel's settler-colonial and apartheid regime as undermining the very legitimacy of the law-based international order.

On the other hand, the success of the BDS Movement for Palestinian rights in compelling giant multinationals, like Veolia and Orange, to abandon their illegal Israeli projects, whether due to loss of multi-billion-dollar projects or reputational damage, has inspired many justice movements.

As savage capitalism reaches a new phase of power and wealth consolidation in the hands of fewer and fewer oligarchs, banks, and corporations, our enemies are more united than ever. Uniting global progressive movements is, therefore, not only ethically required but also politically necessary for any justice struggle to succeed.

When the largest farmers' union in India adopted BDS, it was motivated by a strong sense of internationalism, rooted in India's once historic role as a leading supporter of liberation movements, and a just as strong commitment to resisting the corporate takeover of the Indian agriculture sector by Israeli, among other, corporate criminals.¹⁷

Similarly, a 2015 Black for Palestine statement endorsing BDS highlighted the call to boycott G4S, the world's largest security firm, due to its complicity at the time in Israel's brutal imprisonment of Palestinian political prisoners and in the private incarceration system in the US, which disproportionately targets young Black and brown men.¹⁸

In 2016, the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), the largest Palestinian coalition that leads the global BDS movement, was among the first to unwaveringly stand in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in its struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline project. The BNC statement said:

The BNC supports the restoration of all lands guaranteed by treaty to the Standing Rock Sioux and all other indigenous nations. As indigenous Palestinians, we pledge to stand in solidarity with indigenous peoples around the world, including in Turtle Island, in their struggles for justice, self-determination, restoration of rights and respect for their heritage.¹⁹

Intersectionality, a concept that we have learned from Black feminists in the US, is fast becoming an indispensable component of effective justice struggles of oppressed communities around the world.

To build on the subject of intersectionality: most commonly the concept is used to explain the way in which multiple oppressions overlap and interweave in what Black socialist feminist and Combahee River Collective founder Barbara Smith calls the “simultaneity of oppression.” In activist circles there is a macro-sense of the word that is used as a synonym for how struggles against different types of oppression are linked. Looked at in this way you can see how the question of Palestine both benefits from and contributes to this understanding.

We in the BDS Movement subscribe to the view that oppressions not only intersect but often evolve together in the fields of race, class, and gender, among others. As a result, we believe that resistance must be intersectional too. It is not only ethically compelling to connect resistance against all forms of oppression; it is also a necessity in today's world, particularly this new, Trumpian era of savage neoliberalism, mainstream xenophobia, aggravated racism, and open disdain for democracy and human rights.

We work with various justice movements to develop models for resisting together, beyond mutual solidarity, and we also take seriously the question: How can Palestine contribute to other struggles? Despite our relative weakness as a liberation struggle, Palestinians still command much more international attention and solidarity than many other oppressed groups worldwide. This makes us consider sharing our experiences with others while we simultaneously learn from theirs.

The BDS Movement in the United States has been most successful—with the possible exception of the churches—on college campuses through the activism of Students for Justice in Palestine and through the work to have various academic associations participate in the movement via the academic boycott. Elsewhere in the world, especially in Europe and in South Africa, there have been more successes in trade unions and even on the state level, as in the recent example of Ireland’s Occupied Territories Bill. In some ways this makes sense both because of the ideological effect of the centrality of Israel in the US imperial project but also because of the relative weakness of the US labor movement. As socialists we think that workers and labor have immense power in society, so activating this will be essential. How can rank-and-file militants bring BDS into the labor movement?

Some of the largest trade union federations from Brazil to South Africa and from India to Europe and Canada have adopted BDS as the most effective way to end their respective state’s complicity in Israeli apartheid and to stand with Palestinians in general, and workers in particular, in their struggle for their human and political rights. This is not new, as the international labor movement played a decisive role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

In the US, many coopted and/or corrupt leaders of the labor movement have aligned their unions with Israel and its system of colonial oppression. The AFL-CIO is deeply complicit in Israeli apartheid through its massive investments in Israel bonds, Israeli banks, and more; and through its anti-Palestinian positions. The AFL-CIO has a long history of supporting the Histadrut, Israel’s labor federation that played, and still does in different forms, a prominent role in the colonization and ethnic cleansing of Palestine.²⁰ By some estimates, its Israel-related investments may reach \$5 billion. When Richard Trumka was elected president of the AFL-CIO in 2009, he ignored progressive appeals and harshly denounced BDS.²¹ This is not surprising given the close ties between the AFL-CIO and the US Central Intelligence Agency during the cold war to subvert progressive, anti-imperialist movements and governments around the world.²²

Still, some US unions with progressive leaders have recognized that Israel is an integral and particularly influential part of the global far right, that it supports military dictatorships and genocidal regimes from Latin America to Africa to Asia, and that it is a key player in maintaining US imperialism. This has led to more support for Palestinian liberation, including BDS.

In 2014, UAW Local 2865, the union representing student workers at the University of California, became the first US union to join the BDS Movement. The thirty-thousand-strong United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) in 2015 became the second national labor union in the US to endorse BDS. The National Labor Relations Board has dismissed attempts by a pro-Israel lobby organization to legally challenge the union’s decision.

To further grow support for BDS in the US labor movement, more education is needed about the role Israel’s regime of oppression and its military-security complex play globally in intrusive surveillance, in arming and training despotic regimes, and in spreading the doctrines and tools of

militarization and securitization that are used by far-right forces against communities of color, workers, farmers, and other oppressed groups.

We also need to highlight the crucial connection between imperialist wars, the consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of the few, and the eroding wages and rights of workers in the US and elsewhere. Struggling to end US wars on mostly people of color overseas is inextricably linked to struggles for economic and social justice at home.

In addition, to further integrate BDS in labor struggles in the US, intersectional and strategic targets need to be identified, connecting struggles for labor rights with global struggles for freedom and justice, including in Palestine.

Earlier this year, several BDS chapters called for a boycott of Saudi Arabia over its US-backed war on Yemen. What role do you see the BDS Movement having in the wider struggle against imperialism in the Middle East?

In 2018, the BDS Movement issued an important statement calling on “progressives and social movements everywhere to pressure their governments to impose strict military embargoes on all states that are perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Myanmar.”[23](#)

Since its inception, the global, Palestinian-led BDS movement has believed that Palestinian freedom, justice, and equality are directly linked to the struggles for democracy, human rights, social and economic justice, gender equality, and more, in our region and across the world. Despotism Arab regimes are simultaneously the enemies of their peoples and of the Palestinian cause.

While BDS adheres to its human rights mandate quite strictly, it stands in solidarity with oppressed communities everywhere fighting oppression and aspiring to a life of justice, freedom, and dignity.

The BDS Movement, anchored in international law and human rights principles, uses universally understood language that accurately describes the question of Palestine and what’s needed to end international complicity in Israel’s denial of Palestinian rights. In a nutshell, BDS adopts what may be described by hardcore leftists as a “liberal” rights-based stance. But in the Trump era, in particular, rights-based struggles, whether for racial, economic, social, gender, or climate justice, cannot but oppose the domination and hegemony of multinationals, banks, and the global 1 percent over the rest of humanity. These struggles have no choice but to resist the latest forms of brute imperial domination, as exercised by Trump and to some extent European powers, which transcends economic exploitation and pillage to engage in downright systematic disintegration of nations and cultures to make them more exploitable. This is what we are seeing in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, among other Black and brown nations.

The last demand of BDS—for right of return—is one that is continually under fire. In the context of an international refugee crisis, especially in the Middle East and North Africa and Central and South American areas, and with xenophobic racism playing such a big

role in the resurgent far-right movements in Europe and the US, can you talk about the importance of this demand and its connection to the wider question of refugees internationally?

The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands of origin, from which they were ethnically cleansed during the Nakba and ever since, is an inherent right that is solidly anchored in international law. It is non-negotiable. Those who deny that right in order to maintain Israel's anti-Palestinian supremacy and apartheid regime reveal their racist agenda. Palestinian refugees, like all other refugees, are entitled to the right of return and reparations.

The explosion of armed conflicts and civil wars, heightened imperialist exploitation, and blockage of reparations for centuries of colonialism, including slavery, are the main factors behind the recent waves of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, Latin America, and Asia trying to reach affluent Western countries. Far-right politicians are using this phenomenon to fan the flames of extreme nationalism, xenophobia, and racism and to undermine democracy, human rights, and international law in the interest of neoliberal forces.

When I was visiting London as a teenager, I once saw a demonstration in front of the famous department store Selfridges by South Asians against anti-Asian racism in the UK. One protestor carried a sign that read: "We are here because you were there!" This summed up the causal relationship between colonial injustices and the flood of refugees.

In the case of Palestinian refugees, their expulsion from their homeland was a key part of the Western-supported Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, which has always been rooted in European colonialism and in the doctrine of "maximum land, minimum Arabs." Uprooting the majority of the indigenous Palestinians to establish Israel as a supremacist and exclusionary colonial state was, therefore, not coincidental but very much by design.

The ethical solution to the refugee "crisis" around the world is by ending the oppressive conditions that force people to flee their homes and embark on risky journeys to seek refuge in safer places. Justice and reparations are the foundations of ethically addressing this crisis. Similarly, only ending Israel's regime of oppression can open the door for Palestinian refugees to exercise their inherent and UN-stipulated right to return and to reparations.

What role does BDS play in advancing the struggle for Palestinian liberation? What will it take for the Palestine movement to "win," and what is the relationship between BDS and the larger movement for Palestinian liberation?

BDS is one of the main forms of Palestinian popular resistance against Israel's regime of military occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid. It is also the most important form of international solidarity within this resistance. BDS alone can never achieve Palestinian liberation, but its most important contribution to this process is its creative and strategic linking between internal popular resistance and external solidarity. By presenting to people of conscience worldwide their moral obligation to end complicity in Israel's human rights violations, BDS empowers millions who stand in solidarity with Palestinian liberation to translate this solidarity effectively and strategically.

In addition to the fact that BDS is the form of international solidarity that has been called for by Palestinian civil society, what makes it the “most important form of international solidarity”? You mention that “BDS alone” will not be what achieves liberation. Can you say more about how BDS interlocks with the other elements of these processes?

In the last few decades, no other form of solidarity with the struggle for Palestinian liberation has been as effective and impactful as BDS. The BDS Movement has succeeded in unifying Palestinian demands of the world, integrating Palestinian justice with various international justice struggles, and charting a path to ending complicity in Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights as the most consequential form of solidarity.

BDS has transformed solidarity with Palestine from mostly symbolic gestures that had little impact on Israel’s regime of oppression to strategic campaigns that are increasingly isolating this regime.

Internal popular resistance and effective external solidarity, especially in the form of BDS, must work hand in hand to muster the power needed to undermine Israel’s regime of oppression and achieve Palestinian liberation.

BDS activists rightly point to the historic victory in South Africa against apartheid. While properly celebrating the tremendous victory of both international and massive struggle within South Africa that won this important step, there is another side. Post-apartheid South Africa still has massive gaps—very much around lines of race—of income and nearly every other measures of quality of life. South African activist Trevor Ngwane said “There are no miracles in history, and this has been decisively proven in South Africa, where the miracle is turning out to be nothing but the betrayal of workers by its self-appointed liberators.”²⁴ While we look to South Africa as a beacon of hopeful possibility, are there any cautionary lessons to glean and thus not repeat?

In my non-BDS writings, I have argued consistently that political freedom means very little if not accompanied by economic and social justice. Granting the vote to the Black majority has certainly ended political apartheid in South Africa but did precious little to challenge “economic apartheid,” or structural economic privileges disproportionately enjoyed by the white minority at the expense of social and economic empowerment programs for the Black majority.

While this is well beyond the BDS mandate, the third right in the historic 2005 BDS call, which is the right of Palestinian refugees to return and receive reparations, is crucial in this context. Winning that right, as we must, would ensure a basic level of economic justice that would undermine Israel’s economic, not just political-ethnic, apartheid.