

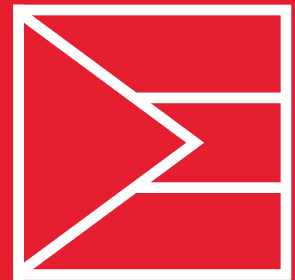
Understanding BDS

- the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement

December 2023



London | Washington



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Background to BDS



01

Background to BDS

Palestinian civil society groups have called for boycotts of Zionist goods since as early as 1922, but it was not until the First Intifada that boycotting became a popular and widespread movement.¹

In 2005, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was launched by a coalition of approximately 170 Palestinian grassroots and civil society groups, as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority's cooperation with the occupation.² BDS was inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement and is coordinated largely by the Palestinian BDS national committee based in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

The BDS movement has three clear demands:

- Freedom for the residents of the occupied territories;
- Equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel;
- Justice for Palestinian refugees in the diaspora – including the right to return to their homes.³

BDS advocates for individuals to carry out targeted boycotts of specific companies to maximise supporters' impact. The BDS committee also calls for a boycott of "Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions" and "Israeli and international companies engaged in violations of Palestinian human rights."⁴

The movement also encourages governments to divest from Israel and impose sanctions, such as "banning business with illegal Israeli settlements, ending military trade and free-trade agreements, as well as suspending Israel's membership in international forums such as UN bodies and FIFA".⁵

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Boycotted Corporations



02

Boycotted Corporations

The BDS movement has primarily called for the boycott of:



Hewlett Packard (HP)

Hewlett Packard helps run the biometric ID system that Israel uses to restrict Palestinian movement.⁶



Siemens

Siemens is complicit in apartheid Israel's illegal settlement enterprise through its planned construction of the EuroAsia Interconnector.⁷ This will link Israel's electricity grid with Europe's, allowing illegal settlements on stolen Palestinian land to benefit from Israel-EU trade of electricity produced from fossil gas.⁸



AXA

AXA invests in Israeli banks, which finance the theft of Palestinian land and natural resources.⁹



Puma

Puma sponsors the Israel Football Association, which includes teams in Israel's illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land.¹⁰



SodaStream

Soda Steam is actively complicit in Israel's policy of displacing the indigenous Bedouin-Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Naqab.¹¹



Ahava

Ahava cosmetics has its production site, visitor centre and main store in an illegal Israeli settlement.¹²



Sabra

Sabra hummus is a joint venture between PepsiCo and the Strauss Group, an Israeli food company that provides financial support to the Israeli army.¹³

Israeli fruit and vegetables¹⁴

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Campaigns to Criminalise BDS



03

Campaigns to Criminalise BDS

Pro-Israel lobbyists have attempted to smear BDS as antisemitic and pushed for the campaign to be criminalised across Europe and North America.¹⁵ Several countries have passed legislation restricting groups' rights to participate in BDS, especially if they receive government funding.¹⁶



US

- The spread of anti-BDS laws in the US is largely due to the lobbying of the *Israel Allies Foundation*, an umbrella group of Israel lobbies headquartered in Jerusalem that has received funding from the Israeli government.¹⁷
- 37 states have passed bills and executive orders designed to discourage boycotts of Israel.¹⁸



UK

- In 2016, the British government issued a procurement policy forbidding public authorities from boycotts on ethical grounds, in response to several city councils having passed motions to boycott goods from Israeli settlements.¹⁹ The policy was passed without any parliamentary debate.²⁰
- Currently, the UK government has put forward a controversial bill targeting BDS.²¹ The proposed legislation is aimed at stopping public bodies like universities and local councils from taking economic action against Israel, though it would also prevent them from implementing their own boycotts against other countries.²²



Germany

- In 2017, the Frankfurt City Council approved a bill that denied BDS the use of city funds and venues. Any organisation found to support BDS risks losing city funding.²³



France

- France criminalises calls to boycott other nations since 1977, on the basis of the Press Law of 1881, which criminalises public incitement to discrimination, and of a 1977 addition to the penal code, which determines that hindering the normal exercise of any economic activity constitutes discrimination.²⁴ The 1977 addition was a response to the Arab League boycott of Israel.²⁵
- France's anti-BDS legislation was strengthened in 2003 with the passing of the 'Lellouche Law', which strengthened criminal penalties and designated national origin as a protected class.²⁶
- In January 2014, a French court ruled that the French Palestine Solidarity Association could not use the words "illegal" or "fraudulent" to describe SodaStream products and ordered the group to pay SodaStream's distributor €4,000 in compensatory damages and €2,500 to cover its legal fees.²⁷

Campaigns to Criminalise BDS continued...



Spain

- In September 2022, the Spanish Supreme Court declared the BDS movement is discriminatory and “infringes on basic rights”.²⁸



Israel

- In 2011, the Knesset passed a law prohibiting calls for boycotts of Israel or its settlements.²⁹ The law allows targets of boycotts to claim damages from people and organisations who promote them without having to prove that they have suffered economic harm.³⁰ It also allows the government to deny contracts and withdraw financial support to boycott promoters.³¹
- As of 2017, Israel can also ban foreigners with links to BDS.³²
- In 2020, Israeli soldiers arrested the General Coordinator of the Palestinian National BDS committee, Mahmoud Nawajaa, during a raid in the West Bank. He was held for 19 days before being released without charge.³³
- In 2017, Israel detained Israeli activist Jeff Halper for alleged possession of BDS material.³⁴

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Successes



04

Successes

BDS has succeeded in generating a popular campaign for boycotting Israeli goods, especially in the Arab world.³⁵

- BDS was a major factor behind the 46% drop in foreign direct investment in Israel in 2014, according to a UN report.³⁶
- Motions in support of BDS have been passed by more than 50 councils in Spain and by dozens of other councils across the UK, Australia, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland.³⁷
- Academic associations in the US, Canada, Ireland, South Africa, and the UK have voted to support BDS.^{38 39}
- Israeli state water company Mekorot has lost out on contracts in Brazil, Argentina, Portugal, and the Netherlands as a result of BDS campaigning over its role in Israel's apartheid water policies.⁴⁰
- The Kuwaiti government has boycotted over 50 companies linked to the occupation.⁴¹
- French telecommunications company Orange left the Israeli market after campaigning in France and Egypt over the role of its Israeli franchise holder in supporting the Israeli military and its attacks on Gaza and its involvement in illegal Israeli settlements.⁴²
- French company Veolia completely withdrew from Israel after a BDS campaign over its role in Israel's colonisation of Palestinian land cost it billions of dollars in lost contracts.⁴³

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Impact of BDS Since 7 October



05

Impact of BDS Since 7 October

Since 7 October, grassroots boycott campaigns have proliferated on social media.⁴⁴ Compared to previous campaigns, which have been directed by the Palestinian National BDS Committee, boycotts since 7 October have been initiated spontaneously by any group(s) and individuals in support of Palestine.⁴⁵

These grassroots campaigns have also been far more wide-ranging than the specific and targeted campaigns of the BDS movement.⁴⁶ In addition to Israeli companies, or companies profiting from the occupation, campaigners have also called for boycotts due to companies' pro-Israel statements or allegedly anti-Palestinian advertising campaigns.⁴⁷

Rather than focusing on technology companies, such as HP or Siemens, boycotting campaigns since 7 October have focused on everyday consumer products from companies such as Starbucks, McDonalds, and Coca Cola.⁴⁸ This shift has arguably made BDS more accessible for individuals, and more successful.⁴⁹

Social media users have also made videos showing products which consumers can substitute for Israel-linked products, also making it easier for individuals to participate in boycotting.⁴⁹

BDS CASE STUDY:

Starbucks



In the aftermath of 7 October, Starbucks has faced calls for boycott due to tweeting its support of Israel, whilst also suing its workers' union after their social media post in support of Palestine.⁵⁹

Since mid-November, Starbucks' share price has seen a sharp decline of roughly 9 percent, meaning a decline of some \$11 billion in its market cap.⁶⁰ However, it's unclear how much of this decline is a result of the boycotts, as opposed to other market factors.⁶¹



Starbucks Egypt has allegedly laid off scores of workers due to the impact of boycotts.⁶²



Starbucks in Lebanon have been a target for students protesting in support of the boycott.⁶⁵



Initially, it was announced that Starbucks and H&M stores will close permanently in Morocco before the end of 2023 due to low demand tied to the ongoing boycott campaign against the companies.⁶³ However, since then, the franchise in charge of Starbucks stores in Morocco has denied the departure, citing a "reorganisation of business."⁶⁴

Impact of BDS Since October 7 continued...



BDS CASE STUDY: McDonald's

After 7 October, calls for boycotting McDonald's began when it was revealed that McDonald's Israel donated free meals to the Israeli military.⁵⁰

The boycott of McDonald's has been particularly strong in Indonesia, Malaysia, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, and Kuwait.⁵¹



An anonymous employee at McDonald's corporate offices in Egypt said the Egyptian franchise's October and November sales fell by at least 70% compared to the same months last year.⁵²

- Sameh El Sadat, an Egyptian politician and co-founder of TBS Holding, a supplier to Starbucks and McDonald's, said he had noticed a drop or slowdown of about 50% in demand from his clients.⁵³
- In response, McDonald's Egyptian franchise has pledged 20 million Egyptian pounds (\$650,000) in aid to Gaza.⁵⁴



In Malaysia, a worker at a McDonald's in Putrajaya, Malaysia's administrative capital, said the branch was seeing about 20% fewer customers.⁵⁵



Since 7 October, several McDonald's stores in Lebanon have seen protests by dozens of university students calling for boycotts.⁵⁶



McDonald's in Kuwait donated \$250,000 to the Kuwaiti Red Crescent for relief efforts in Gaza due to the impact of the boycott.⁵⁷

On 31 October, a pro-Palestine supporter released rats inside a McDonald's in the UK. Other similar incidents have also been reported.⁵⁸

Impact of BDS Since October 7 continued...

BDS CASE STUDY:

Puma

Puma has long been boycotted by BDS supporters due to its sponsorship of the Israeli national football team.⁶⁶

In December 2023, Puma announced that it will be terminating its sponsorship of the Israeli football team from the end of 2024, which



was initially hailed as a success by boycott campaigners.⁶⁷

However, Puma says the decision was taken over a year ago, for business reasons related to contract negotiations, and was not related to consumer boycotts.⁶⁸

BDS CASE STUDY:

Zara

Spanish clothing brand Zara has also faced calls for boycott due to its winter advertising campaign, which launched on 7 December.⁶⁹ The campaign featured models surrounded by rubble and mannequins with missing limbs or wrapped in white sheets.⁷⁰ After more than 100,000 comments on the retailer's posts, Zara removed the campaign and issued an apology, stating: "Unfortunately, some customers felt offended by these images, which have now been removed, and saw in them something far from what was intended when they were created"⁷¹. Consumers



felt the apology was disingenuous and called for the boycott to continue in comments on the retailer's Instagram⁸⁰.

- On 13 December, a Zara store in Scotland was forced to close after being targeted by pro-Palestine activists chanting 'Boycott Zara'.⁷¹
- In Canada, pro-Palestine protestors demonstrated outside a Zara store, which was covered in red graffiti that read 'Free Palestine' and 'Gaza'.⁷²

Impact of BDS Since October 7 continued...

BDS CASE STUDY:

Coca Cola



Since 7 October, Coca Cola has faced renewed scrutiny for its manufacturing plant in a West Bank settlement, and for having donated supplies to the Israeli military.⁷³

- Turkey’s parliament removed Coca-Cola and Nestle products from its restaurants, with a parliamentary source citing a “public outcry” against the brands.⁷⁴
- In Egypt, the boycott of Coca Cola has led to a 300% spike in sales for Egyptian soda-maker Spiro Spathis.⁷⁵
 - Shop owners in Egypt have also refused to stock Coca Cola and Pepsi, despite discounted offers from wholesalers for any drinks made by the corporations.⁷⁶

BDS CASE STUDY:

Ahava



- In December 2023, it was announced that Ahava’s London store will close in September 2024, after neighbouring shops complained to the landlord about the number of protests outside.⁷⁷ Protests outside the store have taken place every fortnight since the 2021 Unity Intifada and the recent attack on Gaza.⁷⁸

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