

The Academic Boycott of Israeli Institutions: The Basics

What is BDS (Boycott, Divestment Sanctions)? A global non-violent campaign aimed at pressuring the state of Israel to comply with international law and Palestinian rights. BDS is a strategy that allows people of conscience to play an effective role in the Palestinian struggle for justice. The campaign was initiated by over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations in 2005.

What would an AAA sponsored Boycott look like? To date over 1000 anthropologists have signed a petition in support of an academic boycott of Israel (<https://anthroboycott.wordpress.com>). Should AAA members pass a resolution in support of academic boycott, this would require AAA as an organization to suspend official ties with Israeli academic institutions (NOT individuals).

5 REASONS TO SUPPORT THE BOYCOTT OF ISRAELI ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

- 1. To express opposition to Israeli state violations of Palestinian rights.** Israel systematically violates the right to education of Palestinians. Israeli forces have raided Al Quds University in Jerusalem, the Arab American University in Jenin, and Birzeit University near Ramallah. This summer, Israeli aerial bombardment destroyed much of the Islamic University of Gaza. The Israeli state isolates Palestinian academia by, among other tactics, preventing foreign academics from visiting Palestinian institutions in Gaza and the West Bank.
- 2. Israeli universities are directly complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights.** Universities discriminate against Palestinians in all areas of student life. Administrators have canceled speakers they deemed “too political,” banned movie screenings, and have even sought to expel students for participating in legal demonstrations on campus. Professors who express criticism of Israeli human rights violations also face increasing retaliation from Universities, up to and including being denied tenure or outright fired for expressing their political views. Moreover, the Israeli government relies on academia to whitewash its crimes. Israeli students can even receive course credit in “hasbarah,” (“public diplomacy”) learning to defend Israeli state policies to an increasingly skeptical world.
- 3. To stand in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for academic freedom and human rights.** Over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations have asked us to aid them in their struggle against occupation and systematic legal discrimination. This boycott is a non-violent form of pressure to act for meaningful change that could lead to a just peace.
- 4. To oppose the misuse of our discipline.** Archaeology is increasingly being weaponized to further the occupation and systematic violation of Palestinians’ rights. Excavations are often designed to displace indigenous Palestinian residents and expand Jewish-only settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Moreover, Israeli archaeological digs have destroyed important artifacts and hid key finds when they do not accord with their narrow ideological agenda.
- 5. To continue a disciplinary tradition of support for anticolonial and human rights struggles.** The AAA has taken strong stances on apartheid in South Africa, Namibia, and Burundi, on violence against indigenous and minority populations in Chile, Brazil, and Bulgaria, and on many other violations of international law. The AAA has also participated in several boycotts such as the Fulbright-Chile program and the Hilton hotel chain. As with these other instances of anthropological support for rights struggles, this boycott represents a concrete and consequential assertion of our commitment as anthropologists to the struggle of the Palestinian people.

5 MYTHS ABOUT THE BOYCOTT

Myth #1: The boycott is unfairly broad and targets all Israeli scholars.

Fact: Our boycott only applies to academic institutions. It does not apply to individuals, nor is it directed at Jews or Israelis. The boycott does not deny Israeli scholars the right to attend conferences such as the annual AAA meeting, come to US universities, or publish their work. It does call for the boycott of institutionally supported events (such as conference held at Israeli universities).

Myth #2: The boycott is a refusal to engage in productive dialogue.

Fact: The boycott does not preclude communication and collaboration with individual Israeli scholars. Indeed, one of its goals is to encourage dialogue about human and academic rights in Israel/Palestine. Boycott is a form of speech, a dialogic act that encourages conversation, connections, dialogue, and exchange based on a set of shared principles of justice, based on an acknowledgement and recognition of the rights and the agency of the oppressed in any such conversation.

Myth #3: The boycott undermines principles of academic freedom.

Fact: It is the Israeli state and its universities that violate academic freedom through military assaults on Palestinian institutions of higher learning, discrimination against Palestinian students in both university systems, and censorship on Israeli campuses. A boycott demands that Israel respect the rights of all people who seek to learn. Continuing to collaborate with Israeli institutions, which systematically discriminate against Palestinians, is what undermines academic freedom.

Myth #4: Anthropologists should not in principle boycott universities because this is where critical debate is fostered.

Fact: While a few courageous voices have spoken out against their own government - often at great personal cost - Israeli universities consistently violate the rights of Palestinians, both citizens and those living under occupation. By challenging the discriminatory practices of Israeli universities, this boycott helps bolster both Jewish and Palestinian critics of Israeli state and university policy.

Myth #5: The boycott is hypocritical since it singles out Israel while the U.S. and other countries also violate human rights.

Fact: This boycott is a way of expressing solidarity with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. Supporting this boycott does not automatically entail accepting or rejecting any other boycotts; we encourage everyone to assess each boycott on its own terms. The boycott is also a way of expressing opposition to the U.S. government's political, military, and financial support for Israel's actions.

For more Information: <https://anthroboycott.wordpress.com/>

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