
FAQ: THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT OF ISRAELI INSTITUTIONS

WHAT IS THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT?

The academic boycott is part of the broader call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against the State of Israel issued by over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations. In 2004, a group of Palestinian academics and intellectuals [called for a boycott](#) of Israeli academic institutions.

The boycott is “inspired by the historic role played by people of conscience in the international community of scholars and intellectuals who have shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in their struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott.”

The boycott of academic and cultural institutions is to be upheld until Israel complies with international law by:

- Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall;
- Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE IN AN ACADEMIC BOYCOTT OF ISRAELI INSTITUTIONS?

Israeli academic institutions are “a key part of the ideological and institutional scaffolding of Israel’s regime of occupation, colonialism and apartheid against the Palestinian people.”

The PACBI [guidelines](#) promote the boycott of Israeli institutions, not individuals, as these are complicit with the Israeli state’s multi-tiered system of oppression that has denied Palestinians their basic rights. The close connection between Israeli universities and the military/intelligence regime [has been extensively documented](#) and some universities are even built on illegally confiscated Palestinian land. Israeli academic institutions racially discriminate against Palestinians in all areas of student life and repress and censor Palestinian student activities. Israel systematically denies Palestinian academics and students freedom of movement, so that they are not able to freely travel for study, conferences, and research, even within Palestine.

DOESN’T THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT CURTAIL ACADEMIC FREEDOM?

No. Supporting the academic boycott is an exercise of academic freedom by scholars around the world (including in Israel) who are motivated by principles of justice.

It is Israel — not those who participate in the academic boycott of Israel — that denies academic freedom and more fundamental freedoms to Palestinians. The academic boycott not only challenges the degraded academic freedom of Palestinians, but also [Israel’s assault on the Palestinian right to education](#).

Palestinian universities have been bombed, schools have been closed, scholars and students have been deported, arrested, and in some cases, killed. Palestinian scholars and students have their mobility and academic careers restricted by an apartheid system that limits their freedom based on selectively awarded permits for residence, travel, and work. Israel also regularly prevents international scholars and students from doing research or studying in Palestine and regulates who can enter its borders to visit Palestinian academic institutions.

What undermines academic freedom, then, is continuing to collaborate with Israeli institutions, which systematically discriminate against Palestinians.

IS THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT PURELY SYMBOLIC?

The highly orchestrated public backlash against the boycott underscores the campaign's significant challenge to Israel's decades-long policies of warfare, occupation, and racial discrimination.

The boycott has a tangible impact on the Palestinian struggle for human rights and the right to education.

Samia Botmeh, a Palestinian scholar at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank, [observes](#) that the academic boycott resolutions in the U.S. put *“pressure on the Israeli academy, which is the first step in alerting this academy that the world is not going to accept its role in repressing the Palestinians.”*

“Undermining the unethical privileged position of the Israeli academy has a tremendous impact on the everyday lives of the Palestinians. [Academic boycotts] empower the Palestinians to continue with their struggle against repression and injustice. It helps turn the experience of survival under colonialism to an experience of resistance on the path towards freedom and justice.”¹

DOES THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT TARGET ISRAELI ACADEMICS? ISN'T THAT ANTI-SEMITIC?

The academic boycott is a boycott of institutions. It does not target any individual based on religious identity or national origin nor does it preclude communication and collaboration with individual Israeli scholars. The boycott does not deny Israeli scholars the right to attend conferences, visit universities, co-author papers, participate in research projects, or publish their work outside Israel. According to the PACBI guidelines, “Mere affiliation of Israeli scholars to an Israeli academic institution is not grounds for applying the boycott.” [PACBI notes](#) that an Israeli academic is entitled, as a taxpayer, to receive funding from his/her government or institution in

¹ Cited in Bill Mullen and Ashley Dawson, Eds, *Against Apartheid: The Case for Boycotting Israeli Universities* (Chicago: Haymarket Press, 2015)

support of academic activities, such as attending international conferences. So long as this is not conditioned upon serving Israel's policy interests in any way, receiving this type of routine funding does not violate the academic boycott. For more info, visit (<http://www.pacbi.org/>)

DOES THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT SINGLE OUT ISRAEL?

It is the U.S. that has singled out the Israeli state for special privileges and unconditional support, and it is the Palestine question in the US academy that has been subjected to intense censorship and silencing. These conditions have created its exceptional status, even as university communities regularly protest, including through boycott, other human rights violations.

Furthermore, the boycott resolution responds to a request from the Palestinian people, including Palestinian academics and students, to act in solidarity with their struggle for justice. If Chinese scholars were to ask other academics to engage in a global boycott of the Chinese academy, we would surely consider doing so. After all, political solidarity is not a zero-sum game.

The US is the largest contributor of military and foreign aid to the State of Israel (\$3 billion a year). Our tax dollars are funding a system of occupation, colonization and apartheid that violates Palestinian academic and other freedoms daily. Adopting the academic boycott is one way that we can encourage a non-violent response to U.S. and Israeli intransigence on this issue. The academic boycott makes a powerful statement that we reject business as usual.

This pamphlet is a project of the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI, www.usacbi.org) and Jewish Voice for Peace (www.jvp.org/academics)

If you have legal questions, please visit Palestine Legal's website, (www.palestinelegal.org), particularly their FAQ on academic boycotts: <http://tinyurl.com/palfaq>