

ASA ACADEMIC BOYCOTT RESOLUTION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The ASA National Council has voted to honor the [call](#) of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. This document addresses frequently asked questions about the academic boycott.

1) What is the BDS Movement?

BDS stands for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. The boycott of Israeli academic institutions is one prong of a global justice movement that is anchored in international law and universal principles of human rights. This movement aims to end Israel's violations of Palestinian rights.

On July 9, 2005 – one year after the historic Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which found Israel's Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory to be illegal – an overwhelming majority of Palestinian civil society groups and organizations called upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel. These are nonviolent measures similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. Israel's legalized system of racial discrimination against the Palestinian people meets the apartheid criteria as defined in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid and the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. That is to say, Israel's legalized system of racial discrimination meets the apartheid criteria as defined under normative international law.

2) What is the academic boycott?

In 2009, during Israel's war on Gaza, the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI) was established in solidarity with PACBI, and has nearly 1000 endorsements from U.S. academics, and support from leading scholars in American studies as well as other fields (www.usacbi.org). The ASA Caucus on Academic and Community Activism generated and proposed a resolution in solidarity with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), whose call for a targeted, institutional – as opposed to blanket – academic and cultural boycott of Israel is widely endorsed by Palestinian civil society. The ASA National Council passed a revised version of this resolution.

3) Why an academic boycott?

The depth of the partnership between the academy and the security-military establishment in Israel is underscored by the fact that all major Israeli universities are governmental institutions, benefitting directly and materially from those conditions, and maintaining them by military, demographic, geographic, and technical research. Many are directly involved in furnishing the ideological justification and technical means for the settler colonial Occupation to continue. Furthermore, not a single Israeli academic institution has petitioned the Israeli government to protect Palestinian rights to education or to cease interference with and destruction of Palestinian schools and colleges.

In addition, there is a close connection between Israeli academe and intelligence/military personnel; campuses are overtly militarized by the presence of armed soldiers. Haifa University and Hebrew University have special programs for military intelligence and training for the Shin Bet (the security service known for its torture techniques), and members of the military and Shin Bet serve on administrative boards of Israeli universities. The Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus is partially built on Palestinian land in occupied East Jerusalem (illegally confiscated by Israel in 1968), in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Other Israeli institutions are also built on illegally confiscated Palestinian land. Israeli academic institutions are part of the ideological and

institutional scaffolding of the Zionist settler-colonial project, and as such are deeply implicated in maintaining the structures of domination and oppression over the Palestinian people.

The ASA supports a boycott of Israeli academic institutions, given that these Israeli institutions are complicit in the multi-tiered system of oppression that has denied Palestinians their basic rights. This complicity has been extensively documented, and manifests through direct research and production of military technologies – as with the Israeli Institute of Technology (Technion)’s partnerships with Israeli weapons manufacturers, such as Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Elbit Systems, and Tel Aviv University’s development of weapon systems used by the occupation army in committing grave violations of human rights. This complicity manifests as well through discriminatory treatment of Palestinian students – as in the university administrations’ crackdown on (and, at times, banning of) Palestinian cultural events and political protests, the surveillance of Palestinian student activism, and the ban on Palestinian students running for student government office at Safed Academic College.

4) Why, given that ASA has such little contact with Israel or Israeli institutions, should ASA take on an issue some may view as “divisive”?

As an organization with a longstanding commitment to social justice, the ASA has a responsibility to take a position on one of the leading social justice and human rights issues of our time. As an organization that represents a leading voice in the humanities and cultural studies, and indeed on contemporary issues nationwide, the ASA is in a unique position to articulate its commitment to social justice and its opposition to extant projects of settler colonialism and racial exclusion, and to help lead the way nationally for other institutions to take part in this worldwide solidarity movement. The ASA is following in the path paved by the Association of Asian American Studies, which in April 2013 endorsed the academic boycott of Israel in affirmation of its commitment to antiracist and anticolonial solidarity.

Moreover, the United States is the largest contributor of military and foreign aid to the State of Israel. While the international community, especially the International Court of Justice, has sought to condemn as illegal the Israeli wall and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, the U.S., using its veto in the UN Security Council, will not allow any effective international response to Israeli occupation or any attempt to make Israel comply with its obligations under international law. U.S. tax dollars fund the Israeli system of occupation, colonization and apartheid that daily violates Palestinian academic and other freedoms. Embracing the academic boycott is one way that the ASA can encourage a non-violent response to U.S., as well as Israeli, intransigence on this issue.

5) Would Israeli scholars be permitted to participate in the ASA conference or to be invited to my campus to speak in general, even if they relied on Israeli university funding?

Yes. This boycott targets institutions and their representatives, not individual scholars, students or cultural workers who will be able to participate in the ASA conference or give public lectures at campuses, provided they are not expressly serving as representatives or ambassadors of those institutions (such as deans, rectors, presidents, etc.), or of the Israeli government.

**In accordance with the “yes” answer immediately above, Israeli academics will be in attendance at the 2014 convention. The ASA will not prohibit anyone from registering or participating in its annual conference.*

6) Would ASA members be permitted to work with Israeli scholars, Palestinian scholars in Israel, and/or collaborate with Palestinian research institutions in Israel?

Under most circumstances, yes. The boycott does not seek to curtail dialogue between U.S. and Israeli scholars. Collaboration on research and publications between individual scholars does not fall under the ASA boycott. However, the boycott does oppose participation in conferences or events officially sponsored by Israeli universities. Routine university funding for individual collaborations or academic exchanges is permitted.

Because it is an endorsement of the academic boycott and the decision of the ASA as an association not to collaborate with Israeli academic institutions, the resolution does not prevent the ASA from working with or inviting Israeli scholars or Palestinian scholars at Israeli institutions to participate in ASA activities as individuals, in the context described above.

In general, the ASA recognizes that members will review and negotiate specific guidelines for implementation on a case-by-case basis and adopt them according to their individual convictions.

7) Does the boycott resolution unfairly single out Israel? After all there are many unjust states in the world.

The boycott resolution responds to a request from the Palestinian people, including Palestinian academics and students, to act in solidarity. Because the U.S. contributes materially to the Israeli occupation, through significant financial and military aid - and, as such, is an important ally of the Israeli state - and because the occupation daily confiscates Palestinian land and devastates Palestinian lives, it is urgent to act now.

8) Wouldn't academic boycott be a violation of academic freedom?

Under the status quo, the academic freedom of Palestinian academics and students is severely hampered, if not altogether denied, by the Israeli state and its complicit institutions, including universities and research centers. Palestinian universities have been bombed, schools have been closed, scholars and students have been deported, and in some cases killed. Palestinian scholars and students have their mobility and academic careers restricted by an apartheid system that limits freedoms by selectively awarded permits, according to residential location, last names, or license plates. Many Palestinian scholars cannot travel easily, if at all, for conferences or research because they are forbidden from flying from the Tel Aviv airport. In this situation of grave injustice, by endorsing the academic boycott, the ASA refuses the negation of Palestinian academic freedom, particularly if the U.S. government is the main enabler of this injustice. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, boycott is basically about "withdrawing support for an evil policy or system." Academic freedom cannot exist under occupation and apartheid. When the occupation is ended, when Palestinian refugees are allowed their UN-sanctioned rights, and when Palestinians in Israel are extended equal rights, we will have produced the conditions for affirming academic freedom in the general context of respect for human rights for all humans, irrespective of identity and origin.

In addition, as Palestinian, Israeli, and other scholars have noted, Israeli academic freedom is often invoked to rebut arguments for a boycott that seeks to extend academic freedom to Palestinians. This rationale only helps to perpetuate the settler-colonial regime, and perverts the meaning and intention of academic freedom itself.

Finally, if academic freedom is understood as the exclusive right of a privileged group, then, as in the case of South Africa, the right to live in dignity and freedom is superior to maintaining such privileges of a segment of the colonial society. Some scholars, like Israeli-British academic Oren Ben-Dor, argue that an academic boycott of Israel would in fact promote academic freedom that is currently curtailed by the state when it comes to the most profound issues related to this colonial conflict.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/oren-bendor-the-boycott-should-continue-492539.html>

In defending Stephen Hawking's decision to boycott a conference in Israel, a *Boston Globe* editorial indirectly defends the BDS movement, saying:

"[Stephen Hawking's] decision to withdraw from a conference is a reasonable way to express one's political views. Observers need not agree with Hawking's position in order to understand and even respect his choice. The movement that Hawking has signed on to aims to place pressure on Israel through peaceful means. In the context of a Mideast conflict that has caused so much destruction and cost so many lives, nonviolence is something to be encouraged."

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/editorials/2013/05/11/stephen-hawking-makes-peaceful-protest/SFOj07rYY9117QHUwEnmSL/story.html>

THE RESOLUTION:

[American Studies Association Resolution on the Academic Boycott of Israel](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ARTICLES ON THE BOYCOTT:

http://www.theasa.net/what_does_the_academic_boycott_mean_for_the_asa

http://www.theasa.net/caucus_activism/item/academic_and_cultural_boycott_campaign/

<http://www.usacbi.org/>

<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108>

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/menaregion/pages/psindex.aspx>

<http://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/journal-academic-freedom/volume-4>

<http://www.usacbi.org/2013/11/new-report-highlights-discrimination-against-palestinians-by-israeli-education-system/>