

BDS Hurts Palestinians Too

The past weeks have seen several milestones in the historic scourge to delegitimize Israel and make anti-Semitism acceptable through what's known as the BDS movement. On the surface, BDS calls for people, ministries, and businesses to *boycott* companies operating or based in the "West Bank" (Judea and Samaria), *divest* from these and other international companies that operate there, and impose *sanctions* on these as well.

Their agenda is more, and unabashedly anti-Semitic.

Over the past decade, BDS has become synonymous with a gross delegitimization of Israel's very right to exist and calls for political sanctions that would effectively erase Israel from the map (Please see my previous article about this here and feel free to email me for further details). There have been some recent victories including U.S. legislation making participation in BSD illegal. That's refreshing, appreciated, and should be encouraged.

However, there have been a number of noteworthy defeats.

Most recently, American Jewish musician Matisyahu was banned at a Spanish Reggae festival due to pressure from the BDS movement after he failed to sign a statement recognizing a Palestinian state. Not only is Matisyahu not Israeli, but no other performer was required to do so as a condition of performing. It's a shining example of BDS' anti-Semitism to its core.

In business, the CEO of French corporate giant Orange drew fire for announcing that his company was going to be withdrawing from contracts and partnerships in Israel, raising the ire of millions in Israel and overseas. But because the contracts Orange has in Israel are with a company owned by Israeli-American mogul Haim Saban, this blew up into something

that has united pro-Israel groups on the left and right against Orange's unique anti-Semitism in specific, and against a wider range of the overall BDS plague.

Adding insult to injury, yet another Christian ministry, the United Church of Canada, voted to divest its holdings from companies doing business in Israel, and added the perverse injunction urging its members to refrain from "tourism [in Israel] which bolsters the oppression of Palestinians." They joined the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church USA and others, who have voted to divest from companies operating in the "West Bank." This is perverse in a variety of ways.

The church voted to boycott products made in the "West Bank" and East Jerusalem. Not products made by Arab companies, mind you, only Jewish ones. They affirmed this on biblical principles, which is a perversion tantamount to replacement theology on steroids.

The United Church of Christ resolution *"calls upon all national entities of the church to boycott goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the occupied Palestinian territories, including, but not limited to, Ahava skin care products, SodaStream products, and Hadiklaim dates; and upon church members to join boycotts of such goods in their local communities."*

By boycotting only companies operating in Jewish areas, many of which have Palestinian Arab workers, the United Church of Christ is guilty of anti-Semitism, and their resolution is a flashback to a time when anti-Semitic pogroms and other violence were carried out in the name of "the church."

By not divesting in companies that provide support for the Palestinian Authority and the hate and terror they inspire, sanction, and fund, the United Church of Christ is guilty of blaming the victim, discrimination against Palestinians, and

harming actual elements of coexistence and the well-being of the Arabs they claim to want to support against Israel's "occupation."

The reality is that thousands of Palestinian Arabs work in Israeli communities and businesses, making good money and often benefits on par with Israeli standards that provide an excellent quality of life and foster coexistence.

One company targeted by BDS frauds is SodaStream. Ironically, that company employed hundreds of Palestinian Arabs, working in good conditions, earning a good living, and coexisting among Israeli Jews with dignity and respect. Sadly, SodaStream, which used to have its primary manufacturing plant in the "West Bank," is now moving. The biggest loser will be the Palestinian Arabs who worked there and will be out of work.

The truth is that what's needed is not to divest from companies in and operating in the "West Bank," but to invest more. Yes, that's right. Fund the alleged "occupation." That's not a political statement, that's a practical statement. That's a human rights statement. That's a formula to lay the foundation for peace.

While the world media portrays Israelis and Palestinian Arabs as unable to get along and live together, facts on the ground affirm the exact opposite. When friends from overseas come to visit, they see—and are shocked—by this reality. But it's a fact.

That's not to say there are no shortage of Palestinian Arabs who don't want to get along, who want to kill and terrorize us, and delegitimize Israel at every turn. From the leaders of the Palestinian Authority, various terrorist groups, and Palestinian Arab media, that's the message that's delivered over and over, and encouraged. But the reality is different.

The PA has made it illegal for Palestinian Arabs to shop in

Israeli stores or buy Israeli goods. But if you come to any of the major grocery stores near my house, you'll hear Arabic spoken abundantly, and see Palestinian Arabs shopping and working right alongside Israeli Jews many of whom, like me, are deemed "settlers" and thus "obstacles to peace." There may not be love, and certainly there is no formal peace, but there is peaceful coexistence in abundance.

Barring actual peace, which seems distant and unattainable under current circumstances, what's necessary is not to boycott and divest, but to build and diversify. Israel—with abundant foreign support and investment—should proactively build and facilitate the creation of infrastructure that will create industry and jobs for Palestinian Arabs. It doesn't matter if the companies are Israeli or foreign, and it doesn't matter if the companies are located in Israeli controlled areas of the "West Bank."

What matters is creating facts on the ground that underscore the reality of prosperity that's being created and provide economic stability and hope. And if the Palestinian Authority will not or cannot do this themselves, Israel can and ought to step in, for the greater good of us all as neighbors.

So rather than boycott and run away, it's time to jump in with two feet. It's time for the JFK moment as he stood in Berlin declaring "*Ich bin ein Berliner*." We need countless businesses and ministries that have a heart for Israel and that care about the welfare of Palestinian Arabs, to counter the BDS fraud and declare, "*I am a Judean!*" Even symbolically, it's time to do business in the "West Bank."

Please contact me to set up a branch of your business or ministry in the Judean Mountains, the original Bible Belt. As BDS frauds say divest, please stand with us, and invest. For as little as \$12 a month I am excited to set up your Judean business address. Setting up your Judean office will provide investment in the area, will foster coexistence, and will give

you a direct foothold in the historic Judean Mountains. You will receive a monthly update, your direct tie to fostering positive relations in Judea. We will tithe to support organizations and ministries in the “West Bank” that strengthen the quality of life and create opportunities for all.

Down the road, we will offer additional business services that will provide further employment for the area’s residents. We will guide you on companies here that are models of coexistence, whose products and services you may especially wish to support. Please share any thoughts or requests you have on what we can do that will help and bless you, from Israel.

We can and should pray for peace, but we can also create economic facts on the ground that benefit all people in the Land of Israel, whether Israeli citizens or not. In 2004 I pulled up my roots from the U.S. and planted myself and my family in the Judean Mountains, affirming God’s gift and promise to Abraham and his descendants. If you can’t join me in person, you can join me in solidarity.

Be among those who bless Israel, and declare today that you are a Judean. Contact me at FirstPersonIsrael@.

Jonathan Feldstein *was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for 's Standing With Israel.*