

OPINION

## BDS is B-A-D for Minnesota

Legislators should bar state contracts with companies involved in Israel boycott.

By Jacob Millner | FEBRUARY 10, 2017 — 6:29PM

There's a movement growing nationwide in support of a policy to prevent discrimination. It's been successfully codified into law in more than a dozen states, and the success of this movement has been celebrated by liberals and conservatives alike.

Unlike many other anti-discrimination movements, there have been no rallies pushing for change, no protests and no unrest or violence of any kind. What has been happening is that regular citizens of states around the nation have contacted their elected officials and asked them for help in ensuring that their taxpayer dollars don't fund discrimination.

From Georgia and California to Iowa and Florida, states around this great nation have joined together to reject the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement, an insidious effort to wage economic warfare against our ally Israel couched in language that makes the idea seem admirable.

At its heart, BDS doesn't seek to change Israel's policies or behavior. It seeks to undermine Israel's right to exist at all. Its supporters have said as much loudly and clearly. They do not wish for a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians living side-by-side in peace and prosperity.

Ignoring actual human-rights abuses from authoritarian regimes around the world, BDS proponents claim that their effort is a peaceful one. They compare their work to the anti-apartheid movement. But they're wrong. By urging a boycott of Israel — the only true democracy in the Middle East — they're harming the chances for peace.

But don't take my word for it. Back in 2013, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said, "[W]e do not ask anyone to boycott Israel itself. We have relations with Israel, we have mutual recognition of Israel."

Israel is a true ally to the United States. Our people and the people of Israel both value democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. Women have equal rights in Israel. Muslims serve in the country's parliament and on the highest court in the land.

Here in Minnesota, we now have an opportunity to join the nationwide movement declaring our state unwilling to cooperate with this discrimination. HF400 and SF247 have introduced legislation designed to ensure that no taxpayer money goes to those engaged in this pernicious campaign. The bill, like those passed in more than a dozen states before it, would prevent the state from contracting with companies involved in BDS.

Our longstanding relationship with Israel is an important one, accounting for more than \$87 million in annual trade between Minnesota and Israel. In 1987, Gov. Rudy Perpich established the Minnesota-Israel Exchange (MNLX) to foster cooperation and promote trade, investment, science and industry between Israel and Minnesota. The exchange has been successful in providing an avenue for Minnesota companies to position themselves in the Israeli market.

More than 100 Minnesota companies are doing business in Israel. These companies include 3M, Radisson Hotels Worldwide, Cargill and others. These companies are some of the most innovative in America and employ thousands of Minnesotans. Other collaborative efforts between our two great institutions, the University of Minnesota and Mayo Clinic — and their Israeli counterparts are ongoing and fruitful.

Opponents of this bill will argue — in fact many already have — that such conditions on state contracting represent an affront to free speech. But they're wrong. BDS seeks to discriminate against people not because of their conduct, but because of who they are. That's wrong, and we shouldn't stand for it.



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In this 2015 photo from Cairo, a man shouted in front of banners bearing the logo for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement

We have a long and proud history of standing up against bigotry, and we should all urge our representatives in government to continue standing up against hatred. BDS is bad for Minnesota, and it's bad for peace. I urge all Minnesotans to support this important legislation.

*Jacob Millner, of Minnetonka, is Midwest regional director and senior policy analyst for the Israel Project as well as a board member of the local Jewish Community Relations Council.*

OPINION

## BDS movement: My Palestinian pride is not measured by your hatred of Israel

There's a sweet spot for legislation at the State Capitol. It would neither support the occupation nor blindly inflict pain on Israelis.

By Walid Issa | FEBRUARY 14, 2017 — 5:57PM

As a proud Palestinian who grew up in the often difficult conditions of the occupied West Bank, I see no contradiction between dedicating my life to achieving a free and independent Palestine and strongly opposing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

At the same time, as a grateful immigrant, I am profoundly hopeful that Minnesota legislators will join me in supporting Palestinians with the same passion with which they rightfully oppose discrimination against Israelis.

Palestinians have learned from trauma after trauma a universal truth: If you do not have a country that is yours, you are always at someone else's mercy. This has not been a very kind history to my people. Our children, however, deserve so much more than empty promises that may never be. If the two-state solution offers me the best chance of self-determination, then how could I oppose it?

Now, when it comes to the occupation, it is illegitimate and must come to an end for Palestine to be free. Like many advocates who support a two-state solution, I could not back the anti-BDS bill currently being debated at the Legislature until it was amended to remove any protections for the occupation. Adding cost to the occupation is something that I do find acceptable.

What I do not find acceptable, however, is indiscriminately boycotting, divesting from and sanctioning all Israelis no matter where they live or work. It doesn't fit with the necessity of a two-state solution. It also doesn't recognize that the Israeli people are a very diverse, textured community, including many who are pro-peace and are true partners.

It is extremely troubling that some activists measure my Palestinian pride by my level of support for their BDS movement. My love of Palestine cannot be measured by how much they want me to hate Israel.

Because I grew up in a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, when BDS advocates speak of hardships and human-rights violations, none of this is a surprise to me. I've lived it.

What, however, is really a surprise to me is that too many of these same activists are ignorant at best and dismissive at worst of the fact that many Palestinians manage to be creative, energetic and hopeful. We do Palestinians a terrible disservice if we look at them only as perpetual victims. We help no one when we blindly inflict pain on Israelis no matter what the collateral damage is to Palestinians.

I've spent countless hours speaking to legislators about the difference between Israel and the occupied territories. I've asked them to not just back our independence, but also to invest in the Palestinian people and support Jewish and Muslim Minnesotans working together to foster peace and reconciliation.

I invite Minnesotans to not just visit Israel, but to tour Palestine as well. In 2016, several Minnesota legislators accompanied me to see the promise of the first planned Palestinian city with a high-tech hub at its center. A year earlier, I orchestrated the first-ever official Palestinian business delegation to Minnesota. Having the Palestinian flag, made by a young woman from Hebron, stand next to the American and Minnesota flags is just one way I've shown my Palestinian pride.

To be truly free, Palestinians must move past charity and dependence to investment and independence. As a Minnesota-trained economist, I know we can contribute if we act upon our Minnesotan values of innovation and bridge building.



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Legislation that would bar state contracts with vendors that "engage in discrimination against Israel" is being considered at the State Capitol

Testifying at the Legislature is difficult, but I've welcomed the opportunity to speak about ending the occupation through positive investment in Palestine, as well as against the BDS movement. After I testified last week, some BDS activists thought it was heroic to try to shame me into silence. Freedom of speech, however, is not an exclusive right to those living within the BDS bubble, and denying me my right to speak is another form of occupation. I don't expect everyone to agree with me, but you demean yourself when you shout "Have you been bought by the Jews?"

A wise man once told me "the Jewish and Arab histories and narratives are precious. They must not become political bargaining chips, or the subject of negotiations." Palestinians and Israelis will not embrace each other's narratives, nor should they abandon their own. They don't need each other to confirm their own identities. What they need is a workable way forward to allow them to live side by side in peace. Hearts as well as minds must change to make this possible. Let this vital work be continued here today.

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