

## BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT &amp; SANCTIONS EXPLAINED

# Righting some serious wrongs

Earlier this year, the Australians for Palestine group sent all Australian MPs a guide to BDS. Senator Scott Ryan writes that the guide was full of mistruths, slander and even anti-Semitism.

**L**AST year, I spoke in Parliament about the international furore that followed the so-called flotilla that illegally sought to break the blockade of Hamas-controlled Gaza.

Recent news of another attempt to break the blockade provoked me to raise the issue in Parliament again, because the vilification of Israel that followed that incident last year was nothing short of extraordinary. It crossed into that dangerous territory where the shadow of anti-Semitism looms.

At the second conference of the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism last year in Ottawa, which I was fortunate enough to attend, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said when Israel "is consistently and conspicuously singled out for condemnation, I believe we are morally obligated to take a stand. Demonisation, double standards, delegitimisation, the three Ds, it is the responsibility of us all to stand up to them."

Sadly, this continues today. It is easier to broadcast photos of tanks in an operation such as Cast Lead than it is to go to the town of Sderot and see people huddled in concrete bunkers; where school playgrounds are designed around reinforced concrete so children can run for protection when the sirens sound as the rockets come from Gaza only a kilometre away.

Locally in Australia, condemnation of Israel finds voice in the so-called Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

It is time to expose the reality of this BDS campaign, to test the claims made and consider in detail the BDS manual produced and distributed by Australians for Palestine.

This manual contains language that is concerning, to put it mildly. This booklet refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of Israel as we know it.

On page 22, it explicitly states: "Thus, it



Groups like Australians for Palestine are trying to make a political stand by convincing people to stop buying Israel-made goods like these Max Brenner chocolates.

Photo: Peter Haskin

does not endorse either a one-state or two-state solution to the conflict."

Even more troubling is the link drawn between Israel's wars of independence and defence with the Holocaust.

To draw such parallels is to diminish the horror of that unique historical tragedy. Those who would advocate so unfairly clearly apply the adage, "Throw enough mud and some of it will stick".

Consider: "Just as Jews expected Germany to accept responsibility for what it did in the Holocaust so, too, will the refugee issue continue to fester and frustrate attempts to bring peace to the region ..."

Notably, such statements are becoming more common as the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles. This is a pointer to our future challenge: to keep the memory alive and history true to the facts.

The manual goes from the offensive to the ridiculously tenuous, attempting to link the most domestic of Australian issues with Israel, asserting, for example: "Connex trains in Victoria did not have its contract renewed after protracted protests in 2009."

Users of Melbourne's trains know that there was no link between Connex losing its management contract and the politics of the Middle East - this was an entirely local issue. Implying otherwise only betrays the shallowness of the BDS campaign.

Again, the effect appears to be that some mud sticks, and that a baseless assertion that is repeated so often it becomes an urban myth can eventually be regarded as containing some truth.

Apart from the examples above, including its reference to the Holocaust, the most offensive example in this manual is the extent to which it attempts to excuse Hamas. It says: "In fact, Hamas has demonstrated a flexible approach to pragmatic politics. It has held to unilateral ceasefires and key

leaders have even expressed a willingness to implicitly recognise Israel's existence as part of a genuine two-state solution."

Hamas is an organisation that retains, to this day, in its own charter, the most vile references to the Jewish people and intense anti-Semitic slurs.

It pledges itself to pushing the Jews into the sea. It commits itself to the destruction of the Jewish State. The language of Hamas cannot be excused or dismissed - or worse, legitimised - by benign labels such as "pragmatic".

The claim that Hamas "implicitly" recognises Israel's right to exist beggars belief.

Australians for Palestine is not a group that supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. I outlined above the lack of commitment even to a two-state solution - this is modern code for the elimination of Israel as we know it. The agenda of groups supporting this misleading campaign is clear: it is to diminish the support for Israel in Australia.

I realised on a recent trip to Israel that the use of Dr Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela was a signal of a major

change in tactics by the anti-Israel Left in the West.

These names are not being used to convince the leaders of the Arab world of the right of Israel to exist in peace as a Jewish state, nor to appeal to the better natures of the people in nations surrounding Israel.

These names are being used because of their appeal in the West. This campaign is aimed at liberal democracies. It attempts to falsely co-opt the legitimate stories of the battle against apartheid and the quest for civil rights. The term "apartheid" is used to conjure up images that bear no relationship to life in Israel - again, hoping that mud sticks.

This so-called BDS campaign seeks to hold Israel to a standard to which neither its neighbours nor the Palestinian Authority are held. Until those standards are applied equally - until the physical attacks on Israel and the anti-Semitic attacks upon the Jewish people are prominently and consistently condemned - this campaign will have no legitimacy, and deservedly so.

But this requires constant vigilance, lest repetition result in mere assertion becoming accepted as fact.

## Under attack

IN ITS BDS manual, Australians for Palestine makes dubious claims as it unleashes its vitriol against some of the following organisations and institutions.

**Jewish National Fund:** "It illegally expropriated most of the land of 372 Palestinian villages, which were ethnically cleansed by Zionist forces in 1948 ... To avoid investigation, honours are bestowed on non-Jewish notables, such as naming forests after them, some of Australia's former prime ministers among them."

**Israeli universities:** "An academic boycott of Israeli universities should be seen in light of their complicity with their government's expansionist and oppressive policies ... Israeli universities are heavily involved in tailored teaching for the military and security services."

**Histadrut:** "Trade unions need to be informed about the discriminatory nature of Israel's Histadrut (main trade union), which from its inception aimed to replace Arab workers with Jewish workers under a 'conquest of labour' policy."