

A CALL TO GERMAN PARTIES NOT TO EQUATE BDS WITH ANTI-SEMITISM

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We, Jewish and Israeli scholars, many of whom research Jewish history and anti-Semitism, express concern about the rise in anti-Semitism around the world, including in Germany. We view all forms of racism and bigotry as a threat that must be fought and encourage the German government and parliament to do so.

At the same time, we wish to sound alarm about a parallel trend: the growing tendency of labeling supporters of Palestinian human rights as anti-Semitic.

This trend is now escalating in Germany. Two German parties, the FDP and AfD, have tabled resolutions at the Bundestag that equate the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement with anti-Semitism. Coalition parties CDU/CSU and SPD are preparing a joint resolution that does so, too. This conflation is incorrect, unacceptable and a threat to the liberal-democratic order in Germany.

The opinions about BDS among the signatories of this statement differ significantly: some may support BDS, while others reject it for different reasons. However, we all reject the deceitful allegation that BDS as such is anti-Semitic.

One should be considered an anti-Semite only according to the content and the context of one's words and deeds and not according to any institutional affiliation. We should protest against any anti-Semitic utterances and deeds – whether they come from BDS supporters or not. But BDS as such is not anti-Semitic. We therefore defend the right of any individual or organization to support it.

Israel and the international community insisted that the Palestinians refrain from violence when opposing the occupation of their land and the ongoing discrimination and oppression they are exposed to. BDS is essentially a non-violent movement, which protests serious human rights violations. The BDS movement does not advocate for a particular political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead, it campaigns for the implementation of international law, often with regard to Israel's occupation and settlements. The movement is [explicit](#) about its categorical opposition to “all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism”. Many Jewish and Israeli groups either support BDS explicitly or defend the right to support it. One can debate and disagree with BDS, but a categorical de-legitimization of such non-violent means is wrong and counterproductive.

We call on all German parties not to submit and not to support any resolutions that equate BDS with anti-Semitism. In particular, we call on the democratic mainstream parties FDP, CDU and SPD to adjust their draft resolutions accordingly.

We also call on all German parties not to exclude NGOs that endorse BDS from German funding. As also confirmed by the European Union, statements and actions in the context of BDS are protected by freedom of expression and freedom of association, as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

Among the more than one hundred Palestinian civil society organizations that signed the call for BDS are respected human rights organizations, associations of lawyers and engineers, committees of farmers and health workers and unions of disabled and teachers. It would be highly detrimental to Palestinian society as a whole and to the role and reputation of Germany, if

these organizations were to be excluded from German funding – simply for exercising their right to free speech and their choice to resist the entrenching Israeli occupation by peaceful means.

If they were excluded, this would contribute to a further weakening of the entire Palestinian society, which already suffered a severe blow when the US government ended its funding to the Palestinians – a decision which Europe deplored.

Furthermore, a decision by the Bundestag to equate the Palestinian-led BDS movement with anti-Semitism offends and stigmatizes Palestinian citizens of Germany and prevents them from freely expressing their opinions, their grief and sorrow. This could also alienate them and other groups in German society and elsewhere from the fight against antisemitism, rather than recruiting them into it.

The equation of BDS with anti-Semitism has been promoted by Israel's most right-wing government in history. It is part of persistent efforts to delegitimize any discourse about Palestinian rights and any international solidarity with the Palestinians suffering from military occupation and severe discrimination.

We urge you to fight anti-Semitism and all forms of racism without aiding these malign efforts. We ask you to safeguard free expression and protect democratic spaces in Germany, rather than to isolate and silence those who non-violently express their political beliefs.

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