

My Turn: Mary Greene: Boycott movement is anti-Semitic

By Mary Greene

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Within the past year, the State of Rhode Island twice stated that the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions movement violates acceptable standards of public conduct. The first such statement was reflected in a law that effectively prohibited, on the grounds of anti-discrimination, state contracts with businesses that participate in the BDS movement. The second was Gov. Gina Raimondo's signing, along with 49 other governors, of an historic resolution stating, in part, "We ... reject efforts to demonize and delegitimize Israel —America's democratic ally in the Middle East —through the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. The goals of the BDS movement are antithetical to our values and the values of our respective states."

The BDS movement isn't new. It consists of a global network of individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pursuing a strategy that dates back to the call of the Palestinian Arab Executive Committee, led by Nazi collaborator Haj Amin al-Husseini, for a boycott against Jews in the British-controlled Palestine Mandate in 1933. Arab nations imposed boycotts against pre-state Israel in 1945 and in 1948, with the stated goal of the "liquidation of Israel."

Today, BDS is the main component of the "Durban Strategy." It was adopted by dozens of NGOs at the 2001 U.N. Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, and crystallized the strategy of delegitimizing Israel as "an apartheid regime" through international isolation.

Operating under a veil of progressive human rights, its recognized leaders have openly declared their ultimate intention: the destruction of Israel. As'ad Abukhalil, a leading BDS activist, wrote in 2012, "Justice and freedom for the Palestinians are incompatible with the existence of the state of Israel." In 2014 at the University of California, Los Angeles, BDS' cofounder Omar Barghouti proclaimed, "Jews are not a people, and the U.N. principle to self-determination does not apply to them."



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The BDS movement has been criticized for a number of reasons: it is anti-Semitic, discriminatory, anti-peace, hurts ordinary Palestinians, and is corrosive of our own liberal democracy. It is important to recognize that the spheres and arenas in which the BDS movement operates include, but are not limited to, campuses, churches, civic institutions, the corporate world, unions, culture and the arts. The danger is the politicization of our own civil society in the service of the BDS agenda.

But the immorality of BDS is paramount, as it attacks only the Jewish people's right to self-determination.

BDS is the immoral collective punishment of Israelis and their associates, undermining liberal values, such as academic freedom and freedom of expression, by restricting openness and tolerance.

BDS is the antithesis of universal human rights values, rooted in double standards that condemn a single country for isolation and pariah status. Its false comparisons to the former South African apartheid regime are an attempt to transform a political/territorial dispute into a question of racial discrimination.

BDS is incompatible with the moral values of Rhode Island, founded on the principles of religious tolerance by Roger Williams.

Yet, this March, the executive minister of the Rhode Island Council of Churches, in an open meeting with a Jewish congregation, declared his personal support for the BDS movement on the grounds that "it is non-violent," and confirmed that many of the members of his council are active in the BDS movement.

In April, two church-based organizations that support BDS cosponsored the showing at a public library of an anti-Zionist film that falsely painted Israel as an apartheid state, solely responsible for the lack of peace with Palestinians.

These groups, purportedly representing moral leadership in Rhode Island, surely have the right to their opinions. That is the essence of the freedom of speech. The same would be true of the KKK or a neo-Nazi cell operating in our state.

However, the moral blindness exposed by those who support BDS is socially unacceptable. Public support of BDS is comparable to using the N-word in speaking of minorities. It is time for our moral leaders to recognize the social unacceptability of the anti-Semitic BDS movement and to publicly renounce their support.

Mary Greene is the communications chair of the Rhode Island Coalition for Israel. This piece was also signed by coalition members Esta Barochana, Judy Dill, Sy Dill, Ken Schneider and Luann Pezzullo.