

We, the undersigned SOMA residents, are writing to express our adamant opposition to a resolution submitted on November 21 to the Maplewood Township Council condemning the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israel (BDS) by three non-Maplewood residents.

This resolution is part of a campaign to effectively deny American BDS supporters their constitutionally protected right to boycott. At the federal, state, and local level, a coordinated anti-BDS campaign is seeking to prevent Americans from employing their protected right to engage in political speech and action, including criticizing and boycotting foreign governments.

The resolution, which condemns the non-violent, Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people, also attempts to obscure the crimes and abuses perpetrated by Israel and to mischaracterize and suppress the Palestinian struggle for justice.

Modeled on the principled movement that brought down apartheid South Africa, the Palestinian BDS movement is a rapidly growing international movement made up of unions, academic associations, churches, and grassroots movements across the world. The BDS movement has garnered the respect and support of Black Lives Matter, as well as the United Nations, Amnesty International, and the ACLU, and many other people of conscience. In its commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for all, the BDS movement is part of the shared struggle of people of color against racial and economic injustice.

The Palestinian BDS call urges nonviolent pressure of Israel until it complies with international law by meeting three demands:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Palestinian land
2. Providing full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties

Instead of attempting to refute these demands on principled grounds, the presenters of the resolution attacked BDS for being anti-Semitic. But there is nothing in the BDS call for freedom, justice, and equality that is anti-Semitic. In founder Omar Barghouti's own words, BDS "consistently and categorically rejects all forms of discrimination and racism, including anti-Semitism." Growing Jewish support for BDS is evidence of that.

The presenters also attempted to suggest that Israel is a beacon of democracy. In fact, Israel is a settler colonial and apartheid regime. Beginning at its founding in 1948, Israel ethnically cleansed 750,000 indigenous Palestinians, who have never been allowed to return to their homes, although the right of return is guaranteed under international law. This tragic event has devastated the lives of millions of Palestinians, including the Palestinian signatories of this letter. Israel maintains an ongoing violent military occupation of the West Bank and subjects Gaza to repeated brutal bombing campaigns and a barbaric blockade. Meanwhile Israel's settlements continue to swell, while Palestinians living in Israel are subject to racist laws and segregation policies, making them second class citizens in Israel. A state that gives different rights to different people based purely on their religious identity cannot be described as a democracy.

Finally, the resolution presenters asserted that BDS threatens peace because it promotes a “hateful agenda.” BDS actually offers the best chance for peace because it is based on an agenda of freedom, equality, and justice, derived from international law.

At a time when the right to dissent and protest in this country is increasingly under attack, we call on the Maplewood Township Council to categorically reject the campaign attempting to smear BDS, deny its supporters their constitutional protections, and provide cover for settler colonialism and apartheid.

At a minimum, the township council should make sure a full and open discussion of the resolution and the issues it raises takes place, one that includes voices of Palestinian SOMA residents. As supporters of equal rights for all, we enthusiastically welcome that debate.

Signed,

John Gordon, Maplewood
Leila Saad, Maplewood
David Letwin, South Orange
Laura Farrell, Maplewood
Carrie Gordon, Maplewood
Barbara League-Velazquez, Maplewood
Nancy Cook, Maplewood
Nancy Elkins, Maplewood
Jean Ng-Gilio, Maplewood
Peter Gilio, Maplewood
Kristin Horton, South Orange
Bill Kransdorf, South Orange
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