

BDS: Permanent Address for Palestinian Solidarity

By Ramzy Baroud

The intellectual dishonesty of Israel's supporters is appalling. But in some odd way, it is also understandable. How else could they respond to the massively growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign?

When a non-violent campaign – empowered by thousands of committed civil society activists from South Africa to Sweden and most countries in between – leads a moral campaign to isolate and hold into account an Apartheid country like Israel, all that the supporters of the latter can do is spread lies and misinformation. There can be no other strategy, unless of course, Israel's friends get their own moment of moral awakening, and join the BDS flood that has already broken many barriers and liberated many minds from the grip of Israeli hasbara.

According to their logic, and that of the likes of Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, writing in the New York Observer on Dec 12, legendary musician and human rights champion Roger Waters is an 'anti-Semite'. In fact, according to the writer, he is an 'anti-Semite' of the worst type. "I've read some heavy-duty attacks on Israel and Jews in my time, but they pale beside the anti-Semitic diatribe recently offered by Roger Waters, co-founder and former front man of the legendary British rock band Pink Floyd."

Of course, Waters is as far away from racism as Boteach is far away from truly representing the Jewish people or Judaism. But what has earned Waters such a title, which is often bestowed without much hesitation at anyone who dares to challenge Israel's criminal policies, military occupation and insistence

on violating over 70 United Nations resolutions, is that Waters is a strong critic of Israel. In a recent interview with CounterPunch.org, Waters stated the obvious, describing Israel as a 'racist Apartheid regime', decrying its 'ethnic cleaning' of Palestinians, and yes, refusing to perform in a country that he saw as an equivalent to the "Vichy government in occupied France."

Boteach is particularly daring to go after Waters, a person adored by millions, and not only because of his legendary music, but also of his well-known courageous and moral stances. But once again, the panic felt in pro-Israeli circles is understandable. What Israeli officials describe as the delegitimization of Israel is reaching a point where it is about to reach a critical mass. It is what Palestinian Gaza-based BDS activist Dr. Haidar Eid referred to in a recent interview as Palestine's South Africa moment.

In an article in the Israeli daily Haaretz published on Dec 12, Barak Ravid introduced his piece with a dramatic but truthful statement: "Western activists and diplomats are gunning for Israel's settlements in the Palestinian territories, and if peace talks fail, the rain of boycotts and sanctions could turn into a flood." Entitled "Swell of boycotts driving Israel into international isolation," Ravid's article establishes a concrete argument of why the boycott movement is growing in a way unprecedented in the history of Israel.

I am writing these words from Spain, the last stop on a European speaking tour that has taken me to four European countries: France, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Belgium. The purpose of my tour was to promote the recently published French edition of my last two books, the second being: *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter, Gaza's Untold Story* (*Resistant en Palestine, une histoire vrai de Gaza*). But at the heart of all my talks was the promotion of what I call 'redefining our relationship to the struggle in Palestine,' based first and

foremost on 'moral divestment' from Israel. Only then, can we change our role from spectators and sympathizers to active participants as human rights defenders. The main address of such activities can be summed up in the initials: BDS.

What I learned throughout my tour, well attended and also covered in French media, was even to surprise me. The BDS debate is at such an advanced stage and it has indeed surpassed my expectations. In my last European tour of 2010, many of us were attempting to push the boundaries of the debate facing much resistance, even from groups and movements that were viewed as progressive. The situation has now changed in such an obvious way that on occasions I was compelled by the audience to discuss the most effective BDS strategies, as opposed to defending the very virtue of the tactic.

And within the two weeks of my travels, there was a flood of news of western governments, companies and academic institutions either joining the boycott or deliberating the possibility of doing so. The Romanian government, for example, is refusing to allow its labors to work in illegal Jewish settlements. A few years ago, this kind of news was simply unheard of.

But what changed? In some respects, nothing, and that is the crux of the argument. The Israeli occupation is more entrenched than ever; the illegal settlements are increasing and expanding; and the so-called peace process remains a charade maintained mostly for political self-serving reasons – a cover for the colonial policies of Israel, and a condition for continued US-western financial and political backing of the Palestinian Authority – and so on. But other factors are changing as well. BDS activists have found a common strategy and are formulating a unifying narrative that is finally liberating the Palestinian discourse from the ills of factionalism, empty slogans and limiting ideology. The new platform is both decisive in its morality and objectives, yet flexible in its ability to encompass limitless groups,

religions and nationalities.

Indeed, there is no room for racism or hate speech in BDS platforms. What is equally as important is that there can also be no space for gatekeepers who are too sensitive about Israel's racially-motivated sensibilities, or those ever-willing to manipulate history in such a clever way as to prevent a pro-active strategy in being advanced. The ship has sailed through all of this, and the boycott is vastly becoming the new and permanent address of the international solidarity with the collective resistance and struggle of the Palestinian people.

Of course, when Roger Waters took the stances that he did, he knew well of the likes of Boteach who would immediately denounce him as 'anti-Semite.' The fact is, however, the number of 'Roger Waters' out there is quickly growing, and the power of their moral argument is widely spreading. Israeli smear tactics are not only ineffective but also self-defeating.

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