



## frequently asked questions



**2** Because the desire to punish Israel economically represents such a small minority of public opinion, the goal of BDS activists is to attach their message (that Israel is an “apartheid state” worthy of economic punishment) to a well known institution such as a university, church or city. This allows them to “punch above their weight” by declaring their anti-Israel message is not simply emanating from a small, non-representative minority, but rather represents the policy of a respected organization.

Another goal is to infuse a campus or other institution with their Israel=apartheid messaging, attempting to make this slander stick, even if boycott or divestment motions themselves get defeated (as they have been, time and time again).

### What are the goals of BDS campaigns?

**OK, I get that boycotts and sanctions indicate political disapproval, but what’s the story with divestment? Don’t people “invest” and “divest” (buy and sell) stocks and bonds every day?**

**1** While economic warfare (such as the Arab boycott of Israel which began in 1921) has been part of the Arab-Israeli conflict since before Israel became a state, the current Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) program pushed by anti-Israel groups to try to delegitimize the Jewish state began in 2001.

The goal of BDS is to “brand” Israel as the new apartheid South Africa (South Africa also having been the target of economic boycotts and sanctions). While this strategy was used sporadically after the fall of apartheid in the 1990s, it was only after the 2001 Durban I “anti-racism” conference (which degenerated into an orgy of Israel bashing) that numerous anti-Israel organizations focused on BDS as their tactic of choice.

### What are the origins of BDS campaigns?

**3** This is an extremely important and relevant question since BDS activists are responsible for many false claims related to ambiguity over the word “divestment.”

As you note, divestment is simply the selling of an investment, such as a stock, bond or mutual fund. Every time you see someone shouting “Sell!” on the floor of the stock exchange, for example, divestment is taking place.

Divest-from-Israel campaigns fall into the category of *political divestment*. Rather than selling investments for economic reasons (such as fear that share price will go down in the future), political divestment involves selling an investment due to a political disagreement with the company or country the investment benefits.

This is an important distinction since, without a public explanation or announcement that investments are being sold for political, rather than economic reasons, political divestment cannot be said to have taken place.



4

To date, no college or university has divested a single share of stock identified by BDS activists as targets for divestment. In addition, at schools where divestment has been driven by online petitions (such as Harvard and MIT), counter-petitions denouncing divestment have received more than ten times the number of signatures as pro-divestment petitions.

In 2002, the leadership at Harvard University took a public stance against divestment, with the then President of Harvard criticizing divestment activity as potentially being “anti-Semitic in effect, if not intent.” While college divestment programs gained

**I've heard that divestment campaigns are very big on college campuses. Have any schools divested from Israel?**

considerable media attention between 2001-2006, institutions of higher learning all followed Harvard's lead in rejecting divestment out of hand.

Campus divestment campaigns made a comeback in 2009 and 2010. See pages 12-17 for some case studies regarding what happened in places such as Harvard and MIT, Hampshire College and UC Berkeley.

5

In 2004, a number of mainline Protestant churches (such as the Presbyterians and Methodists) began looking at divestment policies targeting Israel with the Presbyterians voting to begin exploration of a process of “phased, selective divestment” at their bi-annual conference.

As with universities, however, support for divestment in the churches turned out to be extremely shallow. While some church leaders and regional churches supported divestment, the rank and file categorically rejected divestment calls, with the Presbyterians rescinding their 2004 “phased, selective divestment” policy vote in 2006 by a margin of 95%-5%.

During this period, divestment was also attempted in some US cities (notably Somerville, Massachusetts and Seattle, Washington), but lost badly in both places. When BDS made a comeback in 2009 after a three-year lull, new “targets of opportunity” were chosen such as food co-ops and famous entertainers. See pages 24-27 to learn more about these BDS stories.

**If BDS has failed at colleges and universities, has it been successful anywhere else?**

**If BDS has been so unsuccessful, is it really a threat?**

6

Despite its losing streak, calls for BDS have gained considerable momentum based on a single victory, such as the temporary support divestment had with the Presbyterian Church which was used to inspire hundreds of divestment projects between 2004 and 2006.

BDS controversies also tend to distort debate, demanding discussion only over whether or not Israel should be punished for its “crimes,” rather than pointing out the inaccuracy and unfairness of these very accusations or the responsibility of Israel's accusers for the situation in the Middle East.

Finally, calls for boycott or divestment do tremendous damage to the institutions which embrace them, poisoning the atmosphere and creating hostile environments on campuses and elsewhere. For all these reasons, BDS needs to be fought whenever it rears its head within any civic institution.