

Statistics & Actuarial Science

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Dear TSSU members:

I am writing with concerns regarding the motion to add anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) principles to the TSSU bylaws.

I should make clear at the outset that I have no objection to discussion of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, nor to criticism of Israel. Indeed, vigorous debate and robust criticism of Israeli politics and actions are frequent hallmarks of Israeli society and of Jewish communities worldwide.

The major problem with this sort of motion is its *singling out* of Israel for criticism. In the current bylaws, no other nation or group is the target of social justice activism. Many other countries (such as China, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kenya) are routinely [accused](#) of human rights abuses, and the number of territorial disputes worldwide totals [well over one hundred](#). SFU itself rests on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples. Moreover, while even one death due to armed conflict is a tragedy, the number of deaths due to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict [pales in comparison](#) to the numbers of deaths in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Mexico, and Syria. I am thus confused as to how and why the TSSU has come to be discussing a motion that, among all countries and groups and all conflicts in the world, specifies one and only one entity to be deserving of boycott, divestment, and sanctions: Israel.

The Judicial Board of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) recently recognized the discriminatory nature of such motions by declaring that motions that compel members to campaign against specific countries are unconstitutional and constitute a breach of their Equity Policy. Many of their [arguments against the legality of a BDS policy](#) are directly applicable to the question of incorporating BDS principles in the TSSU bylaws, which include statements on equity similar to those in the SSMU Constitution.

BDS principles are problematic for at least three further reasons. First, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has a long, complex history involving many players on the international stage; the one-sided and simplistic idea that Israel is solely to blame is, at best, far-fetched. Second, an academic boycott would violate the academic principle of the free exchange of ideas. Third, many BDS supporters have as an end goal the destruction of the state of Israel. For example, Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the BDS movement [writes](#): "The two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is really dead. Good riddance! ... We are witnessing the rapid demise of Zionism and nothing can be done to save it. I,

for one, support euthanasia.” And, while the TSSU motion calls for Israel's "ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands captured in 1967", the [document](#) by the Palestinian Civil Society on which this principle is based in fact calls for Israel's "ending its occupation and colonization of *all* Arab lands". The term “all Arab lands” does not distinguish between the State of Israel as determined by the pre-1967 border (which is internationally recognized) and the territories captured by Israel during the 1967 war (which are disputed). The addition of the modifier "captured in 1967" in the TSSU motion thus disguises the true and publicly stated intentions of the BDS movement: the end of the state of Israel.

I understand that, at the TSSU meeting of February 22, 2017, one of the arguments presented in favour of the BDS movement was that Israel is an apartheid state (similar to South Africa in the years 1948 – 1994). Apartheid is defined by the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Court as follows:

*‘The crime of apartheid’ means inhumane acts of a character... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.*

By this definition, South African was an apartheid state between 1948 and 1994, for the following (non-exhaustive) list of reasons:

- Different racial groups were separated and kept apart by law. Intermarriage was prohibited.
- Black South Africans could not vote or hold government office.
- Black South Africans could not hold land in white areas.
- Black students were obliged to attend separate schools – ones that prepared them for lives as a labouring class.

In contrast, Israel guarantees all of its citizens equality under the law. Specifically, all citizens, regardless of religion or ethnic background, are permitted to participate fully in all aspects of government, education, etc., and have access to the same social services. Those who claim that Israel is an apartheid state typically fail to make the distinction between Israel proper (where all citizens have the same civil rights) and the [West Bank](#) and [Gaza Strip](#), the intended future Palestinian state (the vast majority of whose residents are not Israeli citizens and thus do not share their civil rights). For these



FACULTY OF SCIENCE

reasons, the term “apartheid state” does not apply to Israel, and the BDS movement should not be supported on the basis of that (false) claim.

Finally, while I welcome scholarly discourse on the topic of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, past experience suggests that discussions in the context of BDS referenda lead to increased alienation and often violence rather than productive conversation. In particular, a [recent study](#) of U.S. colleges and universities found that

*anti-Zionist activity, particularly BDS, and the presence of student groups and faculty that engage in anti-Zionist activity, are strong predictors of antisemitic activity in general, and conduct that targets Jewish students for harm in particular.*

Closer to home, two UBC students who were distributing anti-BDS information were assaulted by BDS supporters (Rabbi Philip Bregman, Executive Director of Hillel BC, personal communication). Various antisemitic acts, including the painting of swastikas in the UBC residences, also occurred during UBC's student referendum on BDS in 2015.

In summary, even holding a referendum on BDS, let alone incorporating BDS principles into the TSSU bylaws, is very likely to be divisive and will promote blame and aggression rather than education and understanding. I believe that, by taking a more constructive approach to discussions on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and by considering the many other longstanding and complex conflicts in the Middle East and beyond, the TSSU could create an environment for meaningful campus-wide dialogue and thereby contribute to global peace efforts.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to express these views.

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