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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
PROOF
MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST
Israel
SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 6 July 2011 Page 30 Questioner Speaker Senator RYAN</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator RYAN (Victoria) (12:58): Last June, I spoke in this place about the international furore that followed the alleged flotilla that illegally sought to break the blockade of Hamas controlled Gaza. The news of the last few days, and particularly the last 12 hours, has provoked me to speak about this issue again, because the vilification of Israel that followed that incident last year was nothing short of extraordinary. It once again crossed into that dangerous territory where anti-Semitism rears its ugly head, where standards that are applied to Israel do not apply to other nations. I note that over the last 12 to 24 hours a second attempt faltered before it left port in the eastern Mediterranean.

At the second conference of the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism last year in Ottawa, which I was fortunate enough to attend, Stephen Harper said:

... when Israel ... is consistently and conspicuously singled out for condemnation, I believe we are morally obligated to take a stand. Demonisation, double standards, delegitimation, the three Ds, it is the responsibility of us all to stand up to them.

Sadly, this continues today—particularly in some aspects of media coverage of the issues. It is easier for televisions to show photos of tanks in an operation like Cast Lead than it is to go to the town of Sderot and see people huddled in concrete bunkers, where school playgrounds are actually designed around reinforced concrete so that children can run to them for protection within 30 seconds when the sirens go as the rockets come from Gaza only a kilometre away. While the media coverage of the repudiation of the findings of the Goldstone report was not as significant as the misleading coverage of the assertions that were originally made within it and that have now been shown to have no basis, the facts are there for all to see in this regard. But it is up to us, I believe, to bring attention to them.

Today what I would like to speak about is this so-called BDS campaign. I note the motions considered by the Senate in the last month—I will be making no comment about those of course—and I note the public debate over the last three to four months that has thankfully exposed the lies and double standards upon

which this campaign is based. Today I want to raise a few examples of this campaign in detail and consider the so-called BDS handbook produced and distributed by Australians for Palestine. I believe it was distributed to nearly all members and senators in this place.

In this manual we find some extraordinary lies and we find a use of language that is extraordinarily concerning. This booklet and the language in it refuses to even accept the partition by the United Nations in 1948. It refuses to accept the state that was created to be Israel. It goes on to talk about Israel's alleged conquest in 1967 of the Palestinian territories as if it were a unilateral invasion rather than yet another battle for Israel's very existence. It alleges racial discrimination against the Palestinian people without providing anything other than assertions and slurs.

Israel more than any nation surrounding it goes to extraordinary lengths to accommodate its Arab Muslim and Christian minorities, amongst others. This allegation is itself a distortion of this very tolerance and the exemptions from duty such as national service that are granted to the non-Jewish minorities of Israel. More troubling is the linking of the wars of independence and defence with the Holocaust which is the last refuge of the intellectually pathetic as well as those who seek to diminish the horror of that unique historical tragedy. Some of the words the booklet uses are:

Just as Jews expected to Germany to accept responsibility for what it did in the Holocaust so, too, will the refugee issue continue to fester and frustrate attempts to bring peace to the region ...

This is both a historical inaccuracy as well as a baseless slur. Of course, the truth is that the so-called refugee issue is unique in the world. Nowhere else have refugee camps been used for such political purposes by the neighbours but opponents of a nation to continue to create angst and tension against the state that they wish was not there—in this case Israel. Of course, nowhere else do we legally define refugees on such an intergenerational basis. The refugee issue is the tool with which some hope to destroy Israel through simply swamping it with people. There is never mentioned the great yet intermittent expulsions of Jews from Arab lands that followed in the second half of the 20th century. Hundreds of thousands of Jews in nations that they had been at home in for centuries were expelled

from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Morocco and Egypt, amongst others. Jews were forced to leave their homes. Their possessions and all their wealth were stolen often after arbitrary imprisonment or detention. To talk about the movement of people in the Middle East in the second half of the 20th century and only refer to the refugee issue outlined allegedly in the terms by Australians for Palestine without considering the mistreatment of Jews throughout the Middle East at the same time is selective use of history. This booklet also gives away later in the contents what its agenda is. It refers to the BDS campaign:

Thus it does not endorse either a one-state or a two-state solution.

The truth is this booklet gives away with those words the very point of this campaign. The campaign is to remove the state of Israel as a Jewish state. There are other examples I would like to briefly go through in the time I have available. The booklet goes from the ridiculous to the offensive. It says:

Connex trains in Victoria did not have its contract renewed after protracted protests in 2009.

As someone who is a user of Melbourne's trains I can honestly say that in all the discussion of Melbourne's failed public transport network under the previous Labor government this issue was never raised as one of the reasons that Connex trains lost its contract.

The booklet goes on to talk about Max Brenner chocolate which has been in the news this last month as 'this campaign has whipped up a violent mob', where people were arrested because they were behaving illegally. They were seeking to prevent access and egress to a legal place of business. Why was the business targeted? It was targeted because it is a 100 per cent Israeli owned company and too pro-Israel. We also have outlined in this booklet a way to target Israeli goods. It outlines that if you look for the Israeli barcode which begins with the numbers 729 you can avoid purchasing products that originate from Israel. I would not like that to become a modern digital version of the Star of David on products.

Possibly, apart from its reference to the Holocaust, the most offensive example in this booklet is that it actually provides excuses for Hamas. It says:

In fact, Hamas has demonstrated a flexible approach to pragmatic politics. It has held to unilateral ceasefires and key leaders have even expressed a willingness to implicitly recognise Israel's existence as part of a genuine two state solution.

Hamas is an organisation that retains to this day in its charter the most vile references to the Jewish people,

the most vile anti-Semitic references and that pledges itself to pushing the Jews into the sea. It pledges itself to the destruction of the Jewish state. Yet here in this booklet attempting to hide the truth of this campaign it actually provides excuses for an organisation that intentionally targets civilians.

The previous speaker in this matter of public interest debate spoke about the impact on children of commercialisation yet in Australians for Palestine we have a group of people that provides excuses for people who target children on school buses and in their schoolyards with rockets and with bombs. What is the BDS in reality? The truth is that it represents the third wave of the attempt to eliminate Israel. Of course, not all those who supported it are necessarily aware of this objective but the campaign against Israel since 1948 cannot be ignored and this is the latest weapon of those who seek to eliminate it. Sadly, as is often the case with fellow travellers they are sometimes unwitting in the campaign they have been joined to.

The first wave was war. In the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s Israel's neighbours attempted to eliminate the Jewish state by means of traditional warfare. In 1970 the second wave commenced, one that truly came of age in the 1980s, that of asymmetrical warfare, terrorism—targeting civilians throughout Israel and in other parts of the world and using tactics that are utterly repugnant to civilised society. But those campaigns were both failures. Israel could not be broken militarily despite the often extraordinary odds, and the various intifada and terror campaigns did not break its society, which I am in constant admiration of. This campaign is now aimed at undermining support for Israel in the West. The use of names like Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela is a sign that this campaign is aimed at middle-class Australia, not the Arab street. Of course, this comparison is utterly flawed. Martin Luther King, one of the truly great men of the 20th century, was pledged to harmony and non-violence.

The campaign against Israel is anything but. We have seen examples of that in our cities with the violent protests outside stores just in the last month. When allegations are made towards Israel, often without any foundation or evidence, they are never made against others. We hear nothing from groups like this about the oppression of Arab peoples in the states surrounding Israel as we speak. These nations have much worse records on human rights and are direct neighbours of Israel. The issue is that they too are pledged to the destruction of that state. It is this double standard that gives the game away.

Australians for Palestine, through the words they have used in this, are not a group who support the existence

of Israel as a Jewish state. How long until we see the Star of David painted on windows? It may these days be painted in blue with a blue stripe above and below it in an attempt to say it is about Israel, but we know what this means. The agenda of these groups is clear: it is to diminish the support for Israel in Australia.

I recently wrote to Australians for Palestine and outlined some of my concerns about the material they distribute as well as what they have on their website. They have a front-page call to support the campaign to boycott Israel. They have links to groups such as Anarchists Against the Wall, Stop the Jewish National Fund and Intifada Palestine. In this book, in possibly the most egregious misuse of history, they refer to the Simon Wiesenthal Center as 'a notorious pro-Israeli front'. The centre is dedicated to a man who spent his life Nazi hunting and has the Museum of Tolerance and a website with educational tools such as Tools for Tolerance to encourage harmony in our society. To accuse that particular centre named after that extraordinary individual of being 'a notorious pro-Israeli front' is nothing short of offensive.

I see nowhere from Australians for Palestine condemnation of the rocket attacks from Gaza on Israeli civilians; we only see excuses for Hamas. We do not see any call for Hamas or the Palestinian Authority to recognise Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. We do not see or hear of any demands from it that call for the Palestinian Authority to stop its glorification of terrorists, naming soccer tournaments after them, naming streets after them and having their education system encourage vile racism that we would not tolerate in our own communities.

This campaign seeks to hold Israel to a standard to which it will not hold its own proponents, the Palestinian Authority. Until those standards are applied equally, until the physical attacks on Israel and the anti-Semitic attacks upon the Jewish people are prominently and consistently ignored, this campaign will have no legitimacy and will continually be brought to attention in this place.