Learning From the BDS Non-violent Movement

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“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”, were the famous words used by Martin Luther King, Jr. to motivate people never to give up on the need to discuss and debate solutions.

The Palestinians decided to reflect on this quote in their struggle for freedom and justice. Behold a movement, known as BDS, that was and is helping with the struggle for peace and equality. BDS stands for “Boycott, Divest and Sanctions” and it is essentially a non-violent movement that was formed by 170 NGOs. It was initiated by the Palestinian civil society in 2005 as a call for resistance against Israel’s refusal to follow human rights and international law. BDS is a strategy that allows people of conscience to play an effective role in the Palestine struggle for peace and justice.

For decades Israel has denied Palestinians their fundamental freedom, equality and self determination. Even though the United Nations (UN) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) have on numerous occasions held Israel accountable for preeminent Human rights for the Palestinians, Israel still manages to continues without consequences. Due to this continued failure, Palestinian civil society called for a global citizen response and reaction.

The BDS movement highlights the three most urgent needs of the Palestinian people which are: To end the occupation and colonisation of all Arab occupied lands and the dismantling the 8 meter-long wall that has been illegally belt around Palestine land; Secondly, to recognise the rights of the Palestinian citizens and of Israel to full equality; and lastly, respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their home and have their properties returned, as stated in the UN Resolution 194.

While other nations enjoy the freedom of going to other countries with the knowledge that they have a home to return to in their country, this is not the case for the Palestinians. When a Palestinian is forced out of the state, he or she can never go back, resulting in Palestinians holding the highest number of refugees in the world, there are more than 5million Palestinian registered by United Nations as refugees spread around the world.

In addition, there are also a lot of checkpoints that are built in Palestine by the Israeli government, which act as barriers to Palestinian people, especially the youth who often need to travel through multiple barriers to attend school. Palestinian don’t have access to a lot of basic resources such as water and electricity and Israel controls the distribution of these resources. This is unacceptable and is one of the major reasons the Palestinian civil society decided to peacefully strike back.

The BDS movement contains three major parts, namely: Boycott, which targets products and companies in Israel and international companies that profit through the violation of human rights. Anyone can boycott Israeli goods simply by making sure that you don’t buy products made in Israel or by Israeli companies. This will symbolise a sign of unity from concerned citizens and will put more pressure on Israel.

Secondly Divestments are experienced on a higher level through a bank, institution or a pension fund investment. If you are involved in one of these, such as a bank for example, you can petition the bank to remove their investments, they divest away from the occupation. Together, these efforts raise awareness about the reality of Israeli policies and encourage companies to use their economic influence to pressure Israel to end its systematic denial of Palestinian rights. Thirdly in the BDS system is sanctions, which are an essential part of demonstration and dissent for a country’s policies. Israel’s membership of various diplomatic and economic forums provides both an unmerited veneer of respectability and material support for its crimes by calling for sanctions against Israel. Campaigners educate the society about violations of international law and seek to end the complicity of other nations in these violations. A country can decide to close the Israeli embassy or send the Israeli ambassador back to Israel from any country that is not in support of the occupation.

The BDS Movement has had some success: G4S, a large Israeli security company have had their contract with Oslo University (Norway) terminated. A Dutch Water Company terminated their relationship with mekerot following Dutch government advice. Mekerot is Israel’s national water company and is one of the world’s most technologically advanced water companies. Moddi, a Norwegian singer, cancelled his show in Tel Aviv after a call for boycott by the Palestinians in Gaza. The Kairos document, formed by the Palestinian churches, have decided to use the BDS because of their non-violent resistance approach.

The Boycott-movement is gaining momentum around the globe. Let’s join hands work together towards this noble cause.