



BDS efforts are counter-productive

Turning Israel into a pariah state isn't the answer; it has a right to exist, as do we, side by side, in peace



BASSEM EID

I AM A proud Palestinian. I grew up in a refugee camp, raised a large family and now devote my life to working for peace and prosperity for my people. There are many around the world who presume to speak for and act on behalf of the Palestinians.

However, it is we ourselves and not foreign ideologues who must decide our future. Peace, prosperity and freedom are all attainable, but Palestinians also need to create the conditions for peace and work for a better tomorrow.

Here, there is no doubt that the Palestinian leadership – Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza – is failing.

Likewise, many of those in other parts of the world who claim to be working on our behalf are in reality undermining prospects for peace and the welfare of the very people they are supposed to be helping.

Much has been said by lobbies like BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) about the need for the international community to boycott Israel to assist the Palestinian people. In my opinion, however, BDS tactics are a prelude to the destruction of the Palestinians. One sees, for example, how BDS pressure led to Sodastream moving its factory from the West Bank to the south of Israel. The result was that 2 500 Palestinians lost their jobs. When I ask those of them whom I meet what they would say if they met a BDS member, they point out that before, they were earning 6 000 Israeli shekels a month (R17 800); now they were receiving less than a quarter of that.

BDS should have a long-term vision for what is in the long-term interests of the Palestinians themselves. This is certainly not the case at present.

I am one of those Palestinians who believe the time has come to cease listening to Islamic radicals or Arab regimes that use us to continue a pointless, destructive, and immoral war with Israel. We must also stop pretending we can destroy Israel. Despite what we tell ourselves, Israel is here to stay. What's more, it has a right to exist.

We must accept these facts and move on.

The anti-Semitism promoted by Hamas, Fatah, and the BDS movement is not the answer for us Palestinians. The answer is to live in peace and democracy, side by side with Israel.

This is not the vision of Hamas. Rather than furthering the welfare of the people of Gaza, the agenda of Hamas is the Iranian agenda. To that end, it is prepared to sacrifice its own people to wage war against



AN IMMORAL WAR: The writer condemns Hamas for endangering Palestinians' lives during the conflict last year and adds that many Palestinians have lost their jobs because of BDS.

PICTURE: MOHAMMED SABER / EPA

Israel, something that could not have been clearer than in last year's summer conflict.

Any country uses its weapons to protect its people; Hamas did the opposite, using its people to protect its rockets.

I was told by a Gaza Palestinian how he, his wife and seven children were ordered out of their home so that their roof could be used to fire missiles at Israel.

The result was their home was totally demolished. When the Israeli military sent messages to the Hamas population to get out of their houses, Hamas sent their gangsters to block the entrances to their villages and prevent them from escaping.

This was one of the main reasons for the high casualties suffered by the Palestinians

during the war.

In the West Bank, the Fatah leadership is likewise failing. President Abbas runs a corrupt dictatorship that uses international funds to consolidate its own administration rather than develop the Palestinian economy. The result is that in the West Bank, the only good jobs are with Israeli companies, and the BDS movement is doing its best to take even these away from us. In East Jerusalem, the Palestinian Authority is so mistrusted that most Palestinians – and I speak as one who lives among them – would prefer to live under Israeli rule.

Despite our current predicament, I believe our future will be bright if we do what is needed to achieve peace.

What we Palestinians need is a strong civil society and strong democratic institutions, and we need an end to human rights violations within our own ranks.

Here, international donors can assist by ensuring their money is directed towards this goal, rather than towards propping up either Hamas or Fatah. We can have a secular democracy that pursues our own best interests, while living in peace with Israel.

We have it within our power to transform a long-time enemy into a friend, and in the process, benefit from Israel's economic success and democratic values. We, the Palestinian people, have a choice, and we can exercise that choice towards a better future for ourselves and our children.

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