

Submission for the House of Commons Bill Committee: Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

1. [Diaspora Alliance](#) is a new Jewish-led, international organisation that builds solidarity and coalitions with other diasporic and minority communities with whom we share common values and who face overlapping threats. We are committed to explaining and opposing antisemitism and collaborating with other groups confronting racism, authoritarianism, and ethnonationalism. We likewise oppose any instrumentalisation of antisemitism which creates confusion and mistrust, disrupts collaboration between groups, and weakens global solidarity with struggles for human rights, not least in relation to Palestine. We are currently operating in the US, UK, Germany and in the international policy arena.
2. Diaspora Alliance is deeply concerned that the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will prevent public bodies from being able to withdraw or boycott investments that contribute to human rights abuses around the world and undermine our democratic rights and civil liberties. .
 - 2.1. This bill has the propensity to generate confusion regarding how to understand, identify and respond to antisemitism and perpetuate the false notion that addressing antisemitism and supporting Palestinian human rights are mutually exclusive causes.
3. Diaspora Alliance believes that this bill is not fit for purpose and should be rejected in its entirety. At a minimum, DA recommends it be amended to remove the blanket ban of boycotts from Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Occupied Golan Heights.

The Inclusion of Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Occupied Golan Heights - s.3.7

4. Diaspora Alliance believes that including a blanket ban of boycotts of Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Occupied Golan Heights as part of the legislation will have profound detrimental consequences for British foreign policy and those living in Israel/Palestine.
 - 4.1. Their inclusion in s3.7 of the bill sends a clear signal to Israel that they can continue to breach international law and commit human rights abuses with impunity. This is a time of deep instability in Israel/Palestine, with the current

Israeli Government seeking to curb judicial independence and settler-state violence against Palestinians has increased significantly - 211 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in 2023 alone. This blanket ban further limits routes for accountability by the international community.

- 4.2. The current moment in Israel/Palestine requires the international community to show its support for true democracy and justice for all Palestinians and Israelis. This bill risks positioning Britain on the side of Israel's far-right Government rather than those working to protect its fragile democracy and ensure that Palestinian human rights are upheld and respected.
- 4.3. No country should be immune from its obligations under international law. Implying that non-violent methods to put pressure on Israel to abide by international law, such as boycotts or sanctions, are inherently motivated by antisemitism is a pernicious misuse of antisemitism for a broader political agenda. It unfairly degrades supporters of Palestinian human rights and those who take part in non-violent tactics such as boycotts as motivated by prejudice.
- 4.4. Ensuring that international legal principles and obligations are upheld alongside clear accountabilities mechanisms is instrumental to ensuring that Jewish people and all minoritised groups across the world are safe - Israel is not an exception to this rule.

We therefore recommend the bill is amended to exclude a blanket ban of boycotts of Israel, the OPT's and the Occupied Golan Heights from the legislation.

Undermining our ability to combat antisemitism

5. It is highly likely that this bill will impede the UK's ability to combat antisemitism. The rhetoric promoting this bill erroneously conflates efforts to hold Israel accountable with hostility against Jewish people. This kind of rhetoric gives the impression that the most effective solution to combatting antisemitism lies in the protection of the interests of a foreign power, rather than in the policies that protect Jewish citizens of the UK from prejudice, harassment and discrimination - like all other British citizens. Coupled with the recently published UK-Israel Bilateral Relations Roadmap, this is a worrying and unwelcome departure from the British Government.
 - 5.1. Since the 2006 report from the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism, it has been widely acknowledged that criticism and violence directed at Jews living outside Israel which takes those Jews as proxies for the State of Israel should be categorised as a form of antisemitism and combatted as such. By justifying this bill on the basis of tackling antisemitism, it undermines the separation of British Jews from Israel.

- 5.2. The insinuation made by the Government that the fight against antisemitism necessitates restrictions of civil liberties and the right to protest, which is both untrue and dangerous. It is well documented that Jewish life has historically thrived in contexts where democracy and protections for minority communities were upheld.
- 5.3. When antisemitism is politicised, such as to silence and restrict Palestine advocacy, it has the opposite effect of protecting Jewish communities. It generates scepticism as to whether antisemitism remains a problem in contemporary society or if it is just a political tool. It also creates confusion as to what antisemitism is and what it is not; jeopardising Jewish safety by making it more difficult to identify and respond when it arises.
 - 5.3.1. If the Government wants to better protect Jewish citizens and residents of the United Kingdom from antisemitism, then it should prioritise ensuring that Equalities legislation is fit for purpose so that the rights of minorities continue to be upheld by public bodies. The Government should also commit to improving public education on how anti-Jewish racism operates and how best to respond when it arises.
- 5.4. Siloing the fight against antisemitism from other efforts to combat racism and oppression is a misguided approach to Jewish safety. Addressing antisemitism should be viewed as part of a broader political project to combat racism and other systemic oppressions. Antisemitism serves as an agitator for white nationalism (often alongside anti-black racism) most recently through [antisemitic conspiracy theories, such as the pernicious Great Replacement Theory \(GRT\)](#).
- 5.5. Numerous Jewish groups have publicly opposed this bill:
 - 5.5.1. [Na'amod UK](#), a movement of British Jews seeking to end their community's support for the Occupation with hundreds of members, [took action](#) to call on the government to drop their plans to introduce the bill, including hanging a banner on Westminster Bridge. You can read their Twitter thread responding to the first reading [here](#)
 - 5.5.2. The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) [passed a motion](#) at their recent annual conference opposing the introduction of the BDS Bill and committed to writing to the Government to express their concern.
 - 5.5.3. A collection of Jewish youth movements [wrote the Board of Deputies of British Jews](#) raising their opposition to the bill

Broader Implications:

6. As we have seen in the United States, these types of bills have been used as a template for those seeking to restrict other forms of protest or support for other causes. After passing such legislation in 35 US states, anti-BDS laws have been used as a [‘template’](#) for the introduction of other pieces of legislation banning boycotts of fossil fuel and arms companies. For example, the [American Legislative Exchange Council \(ALEC\)](#) is using anti-BDS legislation as a model to block boycotts of oil companies in different states. The passing of this legislation has also resulted in a crackdown on free speech related to Palestine advocacy and human rights.
7. The bill links the right to boycott human rights abuses to the policies of the Government at the time - and in the long term undermines our civil liberties and right to freedom of speech, participation and non-violent protest. This infringes on our collective civil liberties and the right to protest - and undermines democratic norms, particularly in relation to local government.

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