

Evidence Submitted by Omar Mofeed to the Public Bill Committee on Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill (EAPBB36).

1 About myself:

1.1 My name is Omar Mofeed, I am living in London since 2014, and I am Palestinian.

1.2 My grandmother was forced out of her family land in Jaffa in 1948, during the Nakba by the Israeli militant groups, now my grandmother city is called (Tel Aviv-Yafo), then in 1994 my family (including myself) were forced out (again) of Jerusalem by the Israeli groups.

1.3 my family members are living now in more than 25 countries because of the Israeli occupation, and because of the UK promise to give Palestine to the Jewish Zionist, to create Israel in 1948, although the British Foreign minister Mr Balfour stated that the non-Jewish Palestinians rights will not be effected (it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine) (full text below from the UK Parliament website).

1.4 (the text of Balfour declaration)

Foreign Office

November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you. on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours,

Arthur James Balfour

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7766/>

2 Introduction:

2.1 This bill, if enacted, will significantly impact the Palestinians in the UK as well as the pro Palestine activists, the chilling effect will be major. This bill if enacted will make the Palestinian voice invisible and will prevent the local councils, universities, and other public funded bodies from hosting the Palestinians or speak about Palestine. The bill will affect the community cohesion, when the Palestinians and pro-Palestinian (Muslim, Jewish, Christians, Hindu, atheist,..) see that the UK government can allow any community to request Boycotting the government violating the international human rights, except for the case when the Palestinians human rights are violated (as the bill does not allow the British government to allow public bodies divesting from Israel, but the government can allow to divest from any other government.

2.1.1 Example Tower Hamlets council refused to host Palestinian event (organised by a regulated UK charity) over antisemitism fears after the IHRA definition were endorsed by the UK government.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/03/uk-council-refused-to-host-palestinian-event-over-antisemitism-fears>

2.2 in 2020 the Supreme Court ruled that the government decision is unlawful, to stop public bodies divesting, the legal case which proposed to the Supreme court, raised concerns about threats to freedom of expression, government overreach in local democracy and the right of pension holders to have a say in the investment and divestment of their funds.

Again, this bill is threatening the freedom of expression

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200429-uk-supreme-court-rules-against-government-attempt-to-curb-bds/>

2.3 the bill is not clear and is vague, which will make the UK public bodies, including universities, local council, Art centres and the activists, fearing that any decision they may take will be unlawful and it will stop people from campaigning for the good causes, the bill is banning public bodies deciding on divesting from certain countries, but this might lead to the individuals fearing to boycott the companies that violating the international law and the labour rights

2.4 , although the bill affects a broad range of campaigns, what's the government's principal target, it is to protect Israel from accountability to say that, uniquely, Israel must be shielded from anybody who wants to take measures to say, we're not going to invest money supporting your violations of the rights of the Palestinian people?

2.5 The divestment movement is a nonviolent lawful movement, it is good to remember back to the 1970s or 1980s, when there was a global campaign, in opposition to South Africa system of apartheid, one of the factors that made a huge difference was public bodies, including public bodies in the UK councils, universities, making decisions not to divest. In fact, once apartheid was ended, Nelson Mandela came to the UK and made a specific point of saying one of the crucial factors in us as South Africans being able to overturn the system of apartheid, were the decisions of public bodies, including in the UK, no longer to invest in supporting that violation of their rights.

2.6 Although the bill does not stop individuals calling for divestment, but what the government is trying to do is create a chilling effect trying to convince people that there is something illegitimate in supporting boycott and divestment campaigns when they are targeted at Israel, because of its violation of Palestinian rights. So that's the other danger that what this bill tries to do is say uniquely, amongst all people in the world who are oppressed, the Palestinians should be denied the right to call for people of conscience to take action to support their rights.

2.7 When Russia, invaded and illegally occupied the Ukraine, the UK government supported by all the mainstream political parties in the UK took action, first of all, to employ sanctions against Russia, then to provide Ukraine with material support, including weapons, then to encourage public bodies, sporting bodies, to engage in their own boycotts, not to in any shape or form, provide any support for Russia until it ended its illegal occupation of Ukraine. Now, nobody would argue that the motivation for that must be hatred of the Russian people. And the government says no, we are motivated by a concern for human rights, and by the protection of international law. If that is true, then that standard should be applied consistently. And effectively what the government is doing is saying that the Palestinian people do not have the same rights as other oppressed people. They do not have the same rights as other people subject to military occupation. Ukrainians have the right to call on the world for support through boycott and divestment. The Palestinian people should be denied that right. So it's a pernicious argument. And part of the argument is that though, that those of us who are campaigning for the rights of Palestinians are seeking to treat Israel differently. And, the truth is, we're saying no, Israel should be treated like any state that is abusing international law, human rights. It's the government bill that seeks to treat Israel different differently. It has a clause in the bill that says a government minister can decide to say to a public body, you can divest from a company, if a government minister allows you to, apart from one exception, no future government minister can ever make a decision to say it's alright for a public body to divest from a company that's complicit in supporting Israel's violations of international law. So this bill, it's this bill, not those campaigning for Palestinian rights. It's this bill that seeks to treat Israel by a different standard that says uniquely amongst any state in the world that might be violating international law, uniquely, Israel should be given a special protection from accountability. That's the double standard.

2.8 Foreign Office lawyers advised a clause in the bill "would significantly increase the risk of the UK being in breach of our commitments under [United Nations Security Council Resolution] 2334." (Israel's Settlements Have No Legal Validity, Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law, Security Council Reaffirms)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66155179>

2.9 Just this week, (Tamir Pardo) The former head of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency has said Israel is imposing a form of apartheid in Palestine, even the Israeli leaders are saying the Israeli system is not a normal system,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/06/israel-imposing-apartheid-on-palestinians-says-former-mossad-chief>

2.9.1 and it is not a good idea to help the current Israeli government, which senior members on its government call to Palestinian 'Village of Hawara Needs to Be Wiped Out': Israel's Far-right Finance Minister said in 01/03/2023

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-01/ty-article/.premium/palestinian-village-of-hawara-needs-to-be-wiped-out-israels-finance-minister/00000186-9d56-df48-ab96-bd576aac0000>

2.10 The bill is coming shortly after the UK government has announced a trade deal and a unique (2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations), which will make the UK parliament promoting regular exchanges between Israil and UK parliament,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations>

2.11 The bill is coming after the UK universities UKU (which represent 140 UK universities) announced a huge grants (unrevealed) (Funded by UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) to make the UK universities partnering with the Israeli universities, after criticism UK Universities UKU, allowed the grants to be used for partnering with Palestinian universities, but it was too late, and none of the partnership grants were given to Universities in Palestine, the list of granted sponsorship below:

- Aston University - Weizzman Institute for Science
- Aston University - Bar-Ilan University
- Edge Hill University - Tel Aviv University
- Queen Mary University of London - The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Queen Mary University of London - Tel Aviv University
- Royal Veterinary College - Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Teeside University - Tel Aviv University
- UCL - Tel Aviv University
- University of Exeter - Tel Aviv University
- University of Greenwich - Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- University of Kent - Technion
- University of Leeds - Tel Hai College
- University of Plymouth - Technion
- University of Surrey - Bar-Ilan University

Funded by UK Department for Business.

UUKi announces new UK-Israel innovation researcher mobility scheme awardees

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/events-and-news/uuki-news/uuki-announces-new-uk-israel-innovation>

3 THE BILL:

One of the bill articles (article 3 Exceptions)

Paragraph 7 Regulations under subsection (5) may not specify, and regulations under subsection (2) may not result in a description of decision or consideration relating specifically or mainly to—

- (a) Israel, 10
- (b) the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or
- (c) the Occupied Golan Heights.

The bill has exempted three areas (Israel, the Palestinian occupied territories, and the Golan Heights)

The three (separate) areas are controlled by Israel, Israel call the land of West Bank, Golan as Israel, treat them as the land of Israel, and include them in its overall is 22,145 sq. km area of land.

Quote from the Israeli foreign ministry website

(Long and narrow in shape, Israel is approximately 470 km. (290 miles) long, and approximately 135 km. (85 miles) wide at its widest point. The total area of the state of Israel - including Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and the Golan Heights - is 22,145 sq. km., of which 2.1% is water.)

<https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/topographical-map-of-israel>

Topographical map of Israel

Publish Date: 24.10.2021

Share: 

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<https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/topographical-map-of-israel>

The bill is indirectly accepting the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian territory and the occupied Golan Heights), which is against the international law, and will support the continues stealing of the Palestinian land, this bill will be a retreat from his His Majesty's Government, and the UK parliament from its commitment to a two-state solution,

The UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mr Jonathan Allen CMG, said on 20/02/2018 the below

(The United Kingdom's position on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement has not changed. It should be based on the lines as they stood on June 4, 1967 with equal land swaps to reflect the national, security, and religious interests of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/reaffirming-uk-commitment-to-a-two-state-solution-which-ends-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>

The bill does not reflect the above commitment.

4 Recommendation,

As a Palestinian individual, who's not an expert in politics, but been in the UK for many years, and for the reasons I submitted above, I call for the committee to reject this bill, as it breaches the freedom of expression, and the UK commitments under [United Nations Security Council Resolution] 2334.", the bill will impact the community cohesion, and will make Palestinians and certain communities feeling they are not equal to other communities which the UK government can allow them to call for divestment, tens of groups of civil society made of youth organisations, trade unions, faith, human rights, climate change from all religions and nonreligions have publicly rejected the bill.

<https://righttoboycott.org.uk/>

<https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/ujs-and-jewish-youth-groups-confirm-opposition-to-uk-governments-anti-bds-bill/>

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my views, and I am available if any further information is required from my end,

looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards

Omar.

September 2023.