

Joel Marcovitch: Testimony in Support of HB 476
Ohio House of Representatives | Committee on Government Accountability & Oversight
May 18, 2016 | Columbus, OH

Chairman Brown, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Clyde, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joel Marcovitch and I am the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo.

I will break up my testimony into four main points.

- 1) Why it is fundamental to the Jewish community for this legislation to pass.
- 2) To expose the miss truths that opponents of this bill have told you in order for you to against
- 3) Why the BDS movement is anti-Semitic.
- 4) Why this is nothing to do with the rights of Palestinians.

The words and actions from this chamber reverberate all the around the state. Your decisions are analyzed by our community because this is one of the places where our next generation looks for guidance on how to create a just and nondiscriminatory community.

When a certain group feels marginalized by the actions of an extremist group and ideology, it has no choice but to turn up and speak out and restore parity. By not passing this legislation, this institution is in danger of opening up the probability of alienating the Jewish community and it this reason why we care so passionately about the choices you make in this most respected of state houses.

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For the last two plus years student groups around the state, with local activists and isolated individuals have brought chaos, intimidation, threats of impeachment of leaders and lawsuits against universities and institutions.

At the Student Government meetings at the University of Toledo, statements by student senators were made saying, 'that voting against divestment is just as bad as killing a baby in Gaza.' Community members, some of who have spoken in front of you in this house, who have argued in public forums that 'Ethiopian women in Israel are sterilized by the Israeli government in order not to give birth.' This is nothing more than a modern day blood libel designed to manipulate the unsuspecting public.

The history of those that oppose this legislation is to do anything and harass anyone until you cave into their warped view or they take advantage of your sympathetic view of the world by shielding away context and counter arguments to limit your freedom of choice to make your own mind up and then accuse you of extreme viewpoints when you stray from their side. Case in point being if you say you support Israel, the only democratic state in the Middle East and you are labeled a baby killer. You think that the Palestinians should lay down their arms and negotiate a peaceful two state solution, you are automatically labeled a Zionist pig.

The Jewish community and all those that support a peaceful two state solution are asking you not to allow organizations to single out Israel.

By not voting for this legislation, there will be more resolutions and referendums in the weeks, months and years to come that will go before many organizations that will be manipulated to gaining support for this anti-Semitic viewpoint.

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This is a virus, a cancer that has plagued any campus, governing body or institution that has come into contact with it. The virus of anti-Semitism has been able to manifest itself in many different ways for thousands of years. The persecution of Jews throughout Europe at the time of the crusades, and most notably, still within living memory, the Holocaust, where six million Jews were murdered just for being Jews and most recently, the attacks against Jews in France.

Like all viruses they mutate and evolve over time, they attach themselves onto new hosts and wait for a convenient time where the conditions are right and they can spread their disease.

Those that spoke against this legislation will claim that they are not anti-Semitic by saying that they are anti-Zionist. However I am afraid that Zionism, the belief that Jews have a right to their own homeland and self-determination, is a very Jewish concept and this Jewish word has been hijacked again and again by people who do not accept this inconvenient truth.

Zionism is our word and not theirs! Just as when the Native American Indians took back the name Redskin, and African American's took back the N word and how moderate Muslims are trying to claim back the word Jihad, Jews have taken back the word Zionism. When you say you are anti-Zionist you are in fact saying you are anti-Jewish. When you say Zionist you mean Jew. THIS is the new mutated virus that is called anti-Semitism.

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The case in point being, when anti-Israel supporters, be it on campus during the annual Israel “apartheid week,” or protesting on streets or in national conferences, chant “from the River to the sea Palestine will be free.” What they really mean is that from the River Jordan, on Israel’s Eastern border, to the Mediterranean Sea, on her Western border, Israel will be free of Jews. They call for one Palestinian state and not the two state solution that the West and UN recognize as the only solution. This means they call for the destruction of the internationally recognized Jewish state of Israel. Even the pictures of Israel on the back of tee shirts that have a Palestinian flag inside the entire land of Israel does not call for two states for two people. It calls for one Palestinian state and for Israel and the Jews to be wiped out.

One more thing about viruses, is that they like to try and attach themselves onto already well established hosts in order to survive. In this case these anti-Semites have attached themselves to the word Apartheid in an effort to make you believe without examination or inspection that the suffering of the Palestinians is like the suffering of blacks in South Africa or recently the African American struggle in places like Ferguson, in hope that you to identify with these buzz words and allow them a free pass for you to vote against this legislation.

Unlike the South African Government that was explicit about its racial segregation policies, Israeli law is the same for Jewish citizens and other Israeli citizens, with no explicit distinction between race, creed or sex. You have Arabs who are Supreme Court Justices, Members of the Government, and even a past winner of Miss Israel was an Arab. Clearly the same rights given to blacks would not be allowed in Apartheid South Africa.

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In fact Frederik Willem de Klerk, the former president of South Africa who at the time, was the one who negotiated to end his country's apartheid regime, one of the people that can actually speak most about Apartheid, said it was "unfair" to refer to Israel as an apartheid state. As opposed to the racial segregation in South Africa, "you have Arabs living in Israel with full political rights," and "you don't have discriminatory laws against them. I think it's unfair to call Israel an apartheid state."

Are we really going to sit here and pretend those that oppose this legislation should have more weight to it than one of the people responsible for ending Apartheid?

Another fundamental argument of those against the legislation is to plead for places to be an early adopter of BDS because public institutions were late to divest from South Africa. What they conveniently failed to mention was that they divested only after the United States Government allowed public institutions to boycott South Africa. Today the United States Government has rejected time and time again the notion that Israel is an Apartheid state. The very notion that institutions shouldn't be late again for the next boycott is simply Hollywood theater and until the United States Government divests from Israel, divestment should be off the table permanently.

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What's more is that those that oppose this legislation do not care about Palestinians. If it did it would call for divestment against a number of countries that the Palestinians suffer terribly in. In Syria 1,807 Palestinians, over 80% of which are women and children, have been killed since the war began and hundreds of thousands have been displaced and are starving to death. In Egypt 290 Palestinians are being held in detention by the Egyptian authorities, with no hope for a trial and no hope for justice and no reason given for their imprisonment. Egypt also demolished over one thousand homes of Palestinians who live on the Egyptian side of the border with Gaza. Where will these people go? In Jordan, Palestinians are considered second class citizens. The three million Palestinians are discriminated against in private and state-sector employment. A quota system limits the number of university admissions for Palestinian youth. In Lebanon, Palestinians are denied education, property ownership and many forms of employment. Where is the call to boycott, divest and pass sanctions against these countries? Where is the moral outrage? Why are they silent? Where is the hashtag activism and the Egyptian/Syrian "awareness week?"

This do nothing, say nothing approach, only speaking out against Israel proves that the lives of Palestinians who are killed by the hands of non-Jews are worth less to them in their fight, as they cannot demonize and single out Israel for their deaths. The hypocrisy and double standard of singling out only Israel is nauseating and this is why it is anti-Semitic and this is why this charade has to end.

However one can argue that terrible discrimination against Palestinians happens in Palestinian controlled areas.

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Homosexuality is illegal in Gaza. Same-sex marriages, civil unions or domestic partnerships are not given legal recognition in the Palestinian territories. Gay Palestinians are routinely executed or placed in jail for a minimum of 10 years.

Discrimination in the form of the killing of political opponents of Hamas, who are routinely thrown off buildings and dragged behind Hamas vehicles, as well as executed is widely reported. Hamas has successfully crushed all political opposition. It has imposed the will of the Hamas government and created system of strict Islamic courts. There is no freedom of political affiliation or expression in Gaza.

Furthermore, if you are a child in Gaza you are used as a human shield to protect Hamas militants and Hamas buildings. Countless accounts of child human shields were reported by international human rights organizations in Gaza during summer of 2014, where Hamas sent thousands and thousands of rockets indiscriminately into the civilian population in Israel. A spokesperson in Gaza, boast of Hamas' willingness and even eagerness to use children and the elderly as human shields against Israel. Official Hamas Spokesperson, Sami Abu Zuhri went on the official channel of Hamas and said, "The fact that people are willing to sacrifice themselves against Israeli warplanes by being on the roofs of buildings shows that our strategy is proving itself and we, Hamas, call on our people to adopt this practice."

The Palestinian people have been let down by the Palestinian leadership. Walking away from peace deal after peace deal, breaking ceasefire after ceasefire, all to perpetuate the convenient narrative that it is Israel and SOLELY Israel to blame for the lack of a Palestinian state.

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Even tactics of getting a few Jews or Jewish voices for peace to justify their campaign of discrimination and anti-Semitism, is the equivalent of using the West Borough Baptist Church as the only reference to learn about Christianity or using ISIS teachings to tell me everything I need to know about what Islam has to say about the world.

Once you use the fringe element of one community to justify your discrimination of that entire same community, you lose your credibility and should be held accountable.

Those that care deeply for Palestinian rights should focus their anger towards the Palestinian terrorist leadership organization Hamas that according to their charter, and I quote, from Article 7, “The time will not come until Muslims will fight the Jews (and kill them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him!”

And in Article 13: Initiatives, and so-called peaceful solution’s and international conferences, are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic resistance movement. Hamas and those that support BDS do not want peace.

I will leave you with one final quote from none other than Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Abbas was asked about his position regarding the BDS campaign at a press conference in Johannesburg, where he was attending Nelson Mandela's funeral,

He said and I quote, “No, we do not support the boycott of Israel.” He was forced to retract it a few days later because it went against the narrative that those against this legislation are trying to present here.

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I ask you don't give anti-Semitism a yes here. Don't give discrimination a yes. Don't give those trying to divide us further the green light do to so.

Once and for all show that these intimidating tactics and falsehoods and lies will not work. It will not work within the confines of this State and it will not distract you from your important work and obligation to protect against discrimination and persecution.

Thank you.