

The Moral Implications of Doing Business with Israel

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Recently, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski signed of a Memorandum of Cooperation for business development between the State of Oregon and the State of Israel.ⁱ This despite the fact that Israel is widely know around the world to be committing serious human rights violations and racial discrimination against the Palestinian civilian population, both inside Israel and inside the occupied territories. Unfortunately, these facts are less well known in the United States. The decision to do business with Israel is fraught with the moral implications and simply ignoring them is itself an immoral choice. Doing business with Israel makes the State of Oregon complicit in helping to sustain and normalize Israel's occupation and discriminatory practices. In addition to violations of various U.N. resolutions and International laws, the State of Oregon may find that the government of Israel and businesses within Israel do not comply with important state or federal equal employment opportunity laws and laws against racial discrimination. Finally, situations of injustice are inherently unstable and not only carry serious moral risk but make for serious business risk.

Discrimination of non-Jewish Israeli citizens in the work place

Israel has a long history of discriminating against its own Palestinian Arab citizens. There are over twenty laws in Israel that privilege Jews over non-Jewsⁱⁱ. Most recently, Israeli parliament is proposing a Loyalty oath for new citizens that target non-Jews by requiring them to pledge allegiance to Israel as a "Jewish and Democratic" state.ⁱⁱⁱ As over 20% of Israelis are not Jewish, this pledge is designed to force non-Jewish citizens to agree to become permanent second-class citizens or face harassment and discrimination. A recent Israeli report shows that, even though Palestinians represent 20% of the population, there is "massive under-representation of Arab citizens across most of the public sector, including in government companies and ministries, where the percentage of Arab staff typically falls below two percent of employees."^{iv} A recent survey found that "83 percent of Israeli businesses in the main professions admitted being opposed to hiring Arab graduates."^v

Unequal access of non-Jews to housing

Israel also discriminates against Palestinian citizens in housing and access to state resources. In the summer of 2010, Israel repeatedly demolished an entire village of its indigenous Bedouin population in an effort ethnic cleanse them off their lands to make room for new Jewish development.^{vi} Israel's government and courts regularly support housing discrimination. In February 2010, Israel courts upheld discrimination against non-Jews in a housing development in Jaffa that is built in an Arab neighborhood.^{vii} Legislation has been introduced in Israel to allow housing discrimination in neighborhoods on the basis of vague criteria against potential residents who don't fit the

communities "social-cultural fabric." Clearly aimed at Arabs, an attorney for the Israeli rights group Adalah said that the proposed law is "the first in the State of Israel that facilitates apartheid in housing policy."^{viii}

Expansion of Israel's settlements destroying the two-state solution

In addition, Israel is rapidly expanding its illegal settlements on Palestinian lands in the West Bank and Arab East Jerusalem. It is widely recognized around the world that a viable Palestinian state in a just two-state solution requires that Israel stop expanding Jewish settlements. The mayor of a large Jewish Settlement in the Palestinian West Bank told 60 minutes that

"I think that settlements prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state in the land of Israel. This is the goal. And this is the reality."^{ix}

This settlement expansion continues despite demands by the Obama Administration and the Palestinian Authority that it must stop to allow peace negotiations to continue.^x The British Foreign Secretary recently warned Israel that the window of opportunity for a two-state solution to the Palestine Israel conflict is closing because of Israel's ongoing settlement activity.^{xi}

Why is the State of Oregon involving itself in a country which flouts international law and defies our own President's efforts?

Unequal access to water resources

Another important example of inequality fostered by Israel's occupation is the unequal distribution of water resources in the occupied territories. The West Bank aquifers under the Palestinian lands are a vital source of water for the region. Israel has complete control over these resources and distributes them unequally. Jewish settlements built on Palestinian lands are water rich, endowed with green grass and swimming pools. Palestinians receive a fraction of the water and are regularly cut off from the supply, forcing them to build water holding tanks on the roofs of their homes. Amnesty International reported that

"Israel allows the Palestinians access to only a fraction of the shared water resources, which lie mostly in the occupied West Bank, while the unlawful Israeli settlements there receive virtually unlimited supplies. In Gaza the Israeli blockade has made an already dire situation worse. . . . While Palestinian daily water consumption barely reaches 70 litres a day per person, Israeli daily consumption is more than 300 litres per day, four times as much."^{xii}

Israel and Apartheid

In 2009, a study released by Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) attempted to answer the question of whether Israel's behavior fit the legal definition of Colonialism and Apartheid, both illegal under international law. The 300 page report determined that both were being practiced by Israel:

"Permanent annexation of territory in this fashion is the hallmark of colonialism. . . .

Israel's laws and policies in the OPT fit the definition of apartheid in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.^{ixiii}

Surely the State of Oregon should not seek relationships with a government that practices apartheid? There may be those bold enough to suggest that researchers who have lived in an apartheid system cannot recognize apartheid as it applies to Israel. However, the documentation provided by this report provides a long list of Israeli policies that should be at the minimum be avoided and discouraged by any venture with Israel.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his article "Apartheid in the Holy Land" stated

"I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about."^{ixiv}

More Questions to ask before doing business with Israel

Given these very serious concerns and the damage the State of Oregon will do to the human rights of Palestinians by ignoring Israel's abuses, AUPHR asks that the State of Oregon withdraw support for doing business with Israel. We do not want Oregon to be complicit in serious international violations of human rights and human dignity. Should the State of Oregon continue to do business with Israel, the following considerations must be brought to the forefront before it does business with any Israeli company or government entity:

- Is the Israeli organization involved in doing business with or supporting, building, or expanding any of Israel's illegal settlements built on Palestinian lands in violation of International law?
- Does the Israeli organization support Israel's military occupation and domination over Palestinians through development of products or services that enable Israel's human rights violations?
- Does the Israeli organization take advantage of resources, like water or land, which are taken from Palestinians in order to produce products and services?
- Are Israeli citizens who are not Jewish given full rights and opportunities within the Israeli organization? Can a Palestinian citizen of Israel advance into leadership positions within the organization? Are they given the same job opportunities? Are they hired in representative numbers? Do they have the same rights and pay?

Summary

During South African apartheid, the debate between proponents of "economic engagement" with the apartheid regime and a campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) was won by the BDS movement, which answered the call of South African blacks. Apartheid was brought to an end, in part, because of the resulting economic and political pressures. Today, Israel society is enjoying strong economic

growth, but that growth is not resulting in an Israeli re-examination the human rights violations of their government and society. Instead, Israeli Jews are looking away from the situation and allowing the violation of Palestinian rights to increase, both inside Israel and inside the occupied territories.

CBS news correspondent Bob Simon explained why Israeli Jews refuse to look at the Palestinian issue:

"Because they're tired of it and because they're in a state of denial. They are living a very good life. Life in Tel Aviv is a wonderful life and they don't want to be bothered with these questions which don't really have an answer. "xv

By offering to do business with Israel, the State of Oregon will simply help perpetuate this state of denial, the illusion that Israeli Jews can achieve a normal life and economic prosperity while violating the human rights of their neighbors. The State of Oregon should not only help Oregon business thrive, but must also uphold our higher ideals. By doing business with Israel, the State of Oregon will help to perpetuate Israel's human rights violations.

For more information on Israel's human rights violations, the following web sites are valuable resources:

Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

<http://www.adalah.org/eng/>

Amnesty International - Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories Human Rights

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/israel-occupied-palestinian-territories>

B'TSELEM - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

<http://www.btselem.org/English/>

HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual

<http://www.hamoked.org>

Human Rights Watch - Israel and the Occupied Territories

<http://www.hrw.org/middle-eastn-africa/israel-and-occupied-territories>

The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)

<http://icahd.org/>

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)

<http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/>

Who Profits from the Occupation? A database of companies profiting from Israel's occupation.

<http://whoprofits.org>

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- ⁱ **NEWS RELEASE: Governor Kulongoski Signs Business Development Agreement with Israel**, Governor Kulongoski, 27 October 2010, http://www.auphr.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4703&Itemid=44
- ⁱⁱ **Israel and apartheid**, Institute for Middle East Understanding, 10 October 2010 <http://imeu.net/news/article003473.shtml>
- ⁱⁱⁱ **Israel proposes Jewish state loyalty oath for new citizens** Harriet Sherwood, 10 October 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/10/israel-jewish-oath-new-citizens>
- ^{iv} **Rampant employment discrimination against Palestinian workers in Israel** Jonathan Cook, The Electronic Intifada, 21 May 2010, <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11280.shtml>
- ^v **Israel's discrimination against its Arab citizens**, Sawsan Ramahi, June 2010, <http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/resources/briefing-papers/1230-israels-discrimination-aga>
- ^{vi} **Israel: Stop Demolishing Bedouin Homes: Structures Destroyed for Fourth Time in a Month in Negev Village**, Human Rights Watch, 18 August 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/08/18/israel-stop-demolishing-bedouin-homes>
- ^{vii} **Court rejects petition submitted by Jaffa residents over decision to lease complex to religious Zionists**, Ofra Edelman, 12 February 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-upholds-legality-of-jews-only-housing-complex-in-jaffa-1.263200>
- ^{viii} **Equitable housing plans for Jews and Arabs**, JPOST EDITORIAL, 28 October 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/Features/FrontLines/Article.aspx?id=193180>
- ^{ix} **Time Running Out For A Two-State**, Bob Simon, 60 Minutes, 25 January 2010, Solution? <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/23/60minutes/main4749723.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody>
- ^x **UN envoy: Settlements major obstacle to Palestinian state**, JPOST Staff, 22 November 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=192441>
- ^{xi} **Window of opportunity for two-state solution closing, Hague warns Israel**, Harriet Sherwood November 4, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/04/william-hague-two-state-solution-israel>
- ^{xii} **Israel rations Palestinians to trickle of water, Amnesty International**, 27 October 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/israel-rations-palestinians-trickle-water-20091027>
- ^{xiii} **SA academic study finds that Israel is practicing apartheid and colonialism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**, HSRC, May 2009, http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Media_Release-378.phtml
- ^{xiv} **Apartheid in the Holy Land**, Desmond Tutu, 29 April 2002, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/apr/29/comment>
- ^{xv} **A conversation with Bob Simon**, Charlie Rose, 7 January 2009, http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/9900-frame_top