

# The PSC and Palestine Solidarity: Frequently Asked Questions

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## Q1. What's happening?

On June 10, the PSC's Delegate Assembly overwhelmingly approved a "[Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People](#)." The resolution states that "as an academic labor union committed to anti-racism, academic freedom, and international solidarity among workers, the PSC-CUNY cannot be silent about the continued subjection of Palestinians to the state-supported displacement, occupation, and use of lethal force by Israel." It also calls on the PSC to "facilitate discussions at the chapter level of the content of this resolution and consider PSC support of the 2005 call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions—a movement launched by 170 Palestinian unions, refugee networks, women's organizations, professional associations and other Palestinian civil society organizations, which calls on 'people of conscience in the international community' to act as they did against apartheid South Africa 'in the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice and oppression'—and report back on these conversations to the Delegate Assembly by the end of 2021."

## Q2. Where did this resolution come from?

The PSC's Anti-Racism Committee initially proposed the idea. A resolution was then co-written with the support of members of the International Committee and the Academic Freedom Committee. Many of the members involved in drafting the resolution have extensive knowledge and experience in human rights and international law in Palestine and the Middle East. All three committees voted to support the resolution. This is one of the few times that a resolution has been submitted to the Delegate Assembly from multiple committees, reflecting the importance of this issue. The PSC Executive Council chose to substitute its own version of the resolution, which was then amended on the floor of the Delegate Assembly by supporters of the original resolution and approved overwhelmingly by delegates.

The resolution follows two decades of extensive pro-Palestine organizing among CUNY students and workers, most recently including several student petitions ([here](#) and [here](#)), [CUNY4Palestine's Community Statement](#), and a protest organized at [John Jay College](#), all of which call for CUNY to adopt BDS as a response to Israel's settler colonial and apartheid violence. The Community Statement has close to 1,000 faculty, staff, and student signatures and 28 CUNY student and worker organizations endorsing, from Queens College Black Lives Matter to the Puerto Rican Alliance of Brooklyn College.

## Q3. Why now?

The timing of the resolution responds to Israel's latest assaults on Palestinians, including ongoing attempts to force Palestinians from the communities of [Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan](#) (two neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, which Israel has been occupying since 1967 in what many consider to be an example of "ethnic cleansing"; violent attacks by Israeli forces on worshippers

at Al Aqsa Mosque compound, one of the holiest sites for Muslims; and the brutal bombardment of Gaza—already under a fifteen-year suffocating and illegal blockade—during which Israel displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians and [killed at least 232 people, including 65 children](#).

The PSC resolution is also an act of solidarity in response to the massive [May 18 general strike](#) by Palestinian workers and labor organizations. Trade unionists across the globe have responded to the call of [Palestinian unionists](#) to take action to “stop this aggression and Israeli racist policies.”

The resolution follows recent reports by human rights organizations [Human Rights Watch](#) and [B’tselem](#) concluding that Israel is guilty of the [crime against humanity of apartheid](#) and persecution, acknowledging what [Palestinians have been saying](#) for [generations](#). This crime involves a system of spatial enclosures maintained through the apartheid wall, checkpoints, the system of Israeli-Jewish-only roads and settlements, and other infrastructural means, as well as everyday structural racism maintained through discriminatory institutions and laws.

#### **Q4. Why weren’t rank-and-file PSC members consulted about the resolution in advance?**

The original Palestine solidarity resolution went through a more open and democratic process than most PSC resolutions. Two of the three drafting committees, the International Committee and the Academic Freedom Committee, both include rank-and-file PSC members and any member is welcome to participate in them. The Executive Council’s substitute version of the resolution was shared with delegates two days before the Delegate Assembly meeting, and proposed amendments were shared on the DA listserv prior to the meeting.

In general, the PSC’s process for approving resolutions is not as democratic or inclusive as it could be. For example, the DA listserv is not open to all members, and the PSC does not typically send out DA agendas or proposed resolutions in advance to the full membership. Many of the delegates who support the Palestine resolution are in fact working toward greater transparency, democracy, and member engagement within the union. In the meantime, rank-and-file organizers often share information about upcoming resolutions widely via email and social media in advance, and this [happened with the Palestine solidarity resolution](#).

Chapter-level conversations about the resolution in advance of the DA vote would have been ideal, but with Israel’s bombardment of Gaza continuing, members of the drafting committees felt it was urgent to get a resolution to the DA before its next meeting in the fall. The final resolution calls for conversations with membership at the chapter level about the resolution and the BDS campaign during the fall 2021 semester.

#### **Q5. How will this resolution help the Palestinian people?**

The PSC’s resolution has already started making our members more aware of the struggle of the Palestinian people, and it contributes to an ongoing global shift in public opinion toward defense of Palestinian rights and freedom. Of course our resolution won’t, by itself, bring an end to the occupation. But as union members who have ourselves been the beneficiaries of public expressions of solidarity, we know that such statements can encourage us to keep fighting for justice, draw more media attention to our demands, and shift the narrative in our favor.

By opening conversations with PSC members about the [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions \(BDS\)](#) movement, our union is contributing to an international campaign for Palestinian freedom. The example of South Africa in the 1980s, as with the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, shows us that boycotts can be effective in supporting the efforts of oppressed people to win freedom from apartheid. The CUNY Board of Trustees [divested from apartheid South Africa](#) in 1984. If enough CUNY students, staff, and faculty embrace the BDS call, we can also force the university to divest from Israel in the coming years and place CUNY on the right side of history on the issue of Palestine.

#### **Q6. Why is Palestine a union issue?**

The PSC has openly expressed its firm commitment to anti-racism and internationalism. For decades we have taken important stances on international questions in the interest of advancing justice and building solidarity. From the PSC's opposition to [the Iraq war](#), to support for workers facing repression in [Honduras](#) and [Colombia](#), the union recognizes that solidarity is the key organizing principle of the international labor movement. When any organized group of workers asks for us to act in solidarity with their struggle for rights and freedom, we are left with a simple choice: to actively extend our solidarity or to reject solidarity, whether through our actions or our silence. If we want solidarity from the labor movement for our own union's struggles, we must answer the call for solidarity from Palestinian unions.

With this resolution our union has chosen to join the growing labor movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people, from boycotts and pickets in South Africa, Italy, and the UK to the BDS resolutions recently adopted by educational unions in the US, including [the Seattle Education Association \(SEA\)](#) and [the United Educators of San Francisco](#). BDS has become a litmus test for unions to show that they are on the right side of history. Just as happened with the struggle against South African apartheid in the 1980s, when Palestine and Palestinian workers are finally free, it will be celebrated as one of the proudest achievements of international solidarity with people resisting racism and settler-colonialism. Unions can and must be central to this struggle.

#### **Q7. Why is Palestine a CUNY issue?**

As of 2014, [CUNY was investing at least \\$1,093,900 in companies](#) that aid in Israeli colonization, occupation, and war crimes, including weapons manufacturers such as Boeing, General Electric, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon; tech and security companies such as Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, G4S, and Motorola Solutions; and construction firms such as Caterpillar and Cemex. As an institution that claims to be a "people's university," committed to social justice, CUNY has no business investing in or maintaining ties to companies, institutions and organizations that enable the oppression of anyone, including Palestinians.

There is a long tradition of Palestine solidarity organizing at CUNY, going back to anti-racist student movements during the 1960s and 1970s, which has included student-led [initiatives](#) calling on CUNY to divest from investments that support Israeli violations of human rights and international law. CUNY has a majority working class, Black and Brown student body with a large number of Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students who are impacted directly by these issues and who join many other CUNY students and workers in supporting solidarity with Palestine.

For years, CUNY leadership has tolerated and facilitated [the stifling of Palestine solidarity organizing at CUNY](#). Students and faculty speaking out about Palestine, particularly Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and other students of color, have been harassed, surveilled, and defamed by Zionist organizations as well as the NYPD and FBI. CUNY administration has either remained silent or complicit in this repression of student organizing for Palestine, imposing bureaucratic burdens and administrative obstacles not faced by any students organizing around other issues on campus. If we permit repression against any members of our community, that opens the door for further attacks. This resolution helps to protect our most vulnerable students and faculty.

#### **Q8. How is this resolution related to anti-racism?**

The PSC re-committed itself to being an anti-racist organization by setting up the Anti-Racism Committee in November 2020, and this resolution in solidarity with the Palestinian people is the first one proposed by that committee. Anti-racism work that aims to achieve structural transformation must create space for difficult conversations to take place. The union has an important role to play in facilitating these conversations, and in creating an organizing space where all members, especially those from oppressed communities, can be empowered to speak up.

Anti-racist movements such as Black Lives Matter, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, Dream Defenders, Jewish Voice for Peace, Association for Asian American Studies, and many others have affirmed for years that anti-racism requires talking about Indigenous justice, refugee rights, and people's right to live free of colonialism and the crime of apartheid. That means talking about Palestine. As educators in a largely working class, Black and Brown university, we have a pedagogical duty to teach within an anti-racist and decolonial framework that reflects and reinforces the knowledge and lived experiences of our students.

#### **Q9. Is this resolution a distraction from other important union and anti-racist work?**

It's only a distraction if we don't see these struggles as connected. If we believe, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., that "no one is free until we are all free," then we see how this resolution moves all of our struggles forward. The resolution and the proposed BDS conversations also provide us with an opportunity to build a deeper understanding among PSC members of what solidarity means and how we build it. And in the end, solidarity is what we need to deal with the challenges we are currently facing in the workplace and beyond.

Many of the people involved in the resolution process have also been active in struggles against the racist austerity cuts, support for a safe and healthy reopening, expanding adjunct participation through membership retention, and other important anti-racist and social justice struggles within the union, the broader CUNY community, and beyond. If more rank-and-file members get involved with the union, we can fight successfully on all of these fronts and make real gains for CUNY workers and students.

This resolution is certainly not a distraction for our Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students and colleagues who have faced racism and anxiety around [sharing their experiences](#) and knowledge of Palestine inside and outside the classroom due to a [climate of fear](#) promoted by pro-Israel organizations operating on CUNY campuses and an [often complicit administration](#).

#### **Q10. Why does the resolution call for conversations about BDS?**

The PSC resolution is a means for opening up conversations about the United States' unwavering support of Israel's settler colonial and apartheid rule, and what U.S. unions can do to address our country's complicity. In conversations at the chapter level in the fall, members will have a chance to discuss how the PSC engages with the BDS campaign, a Palestinian-led, global movement for human rights, freedom, justice and equality. BDS upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.

The [BDS movement](#) adopts a nonviolent strategy to hold Israel accountable to the same human rights standards and international law as other nations. It is asking the international community to heed the boycott call, as it did in the struggle against South African apartheid, until Israel complies with international law by meeting three demands:

- Ends its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantles the Wall;
- Recognizes the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality;
- Respects, protects, and promotes the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

[BDS does NOT call for a boycott of all Israelis](#). It calls for a boycott of Israeli government institutions and companies that support the occupation. The [institutional academic boycott](#) calls on supporters to “comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic institutions...at the national and international levels.” You can read more about how academics are engaging with the boycott [here](#).

In a [2007 resolution](#), the PSC opposed a UK academic union's support of BDS by arguing that our union “cannot consider supporting or remaining neutral on the issue of an academic boycott in the absence of overwhelming evidence that such a position is the will of our membership.” The current resolution calls for precisely the sorts of conversations at the chapter level that would help to determine “the will of our membership” regarding BDS, since public opinion on Palestine solidarity has shifted significantly since 2007, partly due to greater access to first-hand information about the impact of Israeli apartheid. Members of the PSC's Academic Freedom Committee support the new resolution as consistent with our union's “deep adherence to the principle of academic freedom” as spelled out in the 2007 resolution.

#### **Q11. Will the resolution on Palestine divide our union?**

The Delegate Assembly voted 84 to 34 in favor of the resolution in solidarity with the Palestinian people after several days of vigorous exchanges over email and discussion during the meeting. The amendments that strengthened the resolution—including the one calling for conversations around BDS—passed with similarly wide margins.

It is true that some members of the union have expressed outrage and discomfort with the resolution. Outrage at a resolution that references well-documented human rights abuses and calls for conversations about how the union should respond seems disproportionate when compared with the abuses themselves. As we create space for those who are upset with the resolution to voice their opinions, we should also consider the justified outrage of those members of our community who are directly impacted by settler colonial and apartheid violence, including our Palestinian, Arab and Muslim colleagues and students.

As union activists, scholars, and teachers we should not shy away from uncomfortable discussions and actions. For example, although teaching about slavery might make some white people in the CUNY community uncomfortable, can we imagine giving in to the rightwing, racist attacks on the 1619 project or Critical Race Theory? As Sarah Schuman noted in a recent [New York Times interview](#), “discomfort is good for a society because it means that lots of different experiences of difference are being expressed. And the only people who really insist upon being comfortable all the time are people who are in the dominant position. And the only way they can be comfortable all the time is if everyone else is oppressed, and that’s not a healthy social structure.”

If we come together to have uncomfortable conversations across our political differences, power imbalances, and experiential divides, it will make us stronger—as a political force, as a bargaining unit, and as a union committed to social justice and solidarity.

Just because the PSC represents members with a diversity of perspectives and opinions doesn’t mean we can’t take positions on controversial issues. As this [article by an academic unionist from Australia](#) explains, taking a position on Palestine is an opportunity to explain to our fellow union members that “racism and colonialism are the enemies of workers everywhere, and that meaningful solidarity is an obligation. Declaring a topic like the boycott [against Israel] off-limits is a sure-fire way of suppressing political energy and cultivating timidity and hesitation – exactly the qualities that employers want to foster in union members.”

#### **Q12. Is this resolution antisemitic?**

Antisemitism is discrimination against Jewish people based on their religion and/or ethnic heritage. The state of Israel does not speak for or represent all Jewish people, and no government is beyond criticism. Many Jewish PSC members firmly support the resolution and endorse the call for BDS as a nonviolent tactic aimed at Israeli institutions that are directly complicit in systematic discrimination against Palestinians. The text of the resolution makes clear that the PSC condemns racism and discrimination in all forms, including antisemitism, and that criticism of Israel is not antisemitic.

[For decades, grassroots Palestinian organizers](#) have [roundly rejected antisemitism](#). Palestinian liberation and [dismantling antisemitism](#) are [intertwined projects](#). Jewish organizations such as [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) and [If Not Now](#) take a strong stand for BDS as an important strategy for supporting Palestinian freedom and ending Israeli apartheid.

Anti-Palestinian propagandists often use false accusations of antisemitism to discredit and silence anyone, including Jewish people, speaking out for Palestinian freedom. Israel also uses such accusations to portray itself as a victim despite its immense and disproportionate military, economic, and political power over Palestine.

#### **Q13. Why focus on Israel and not other human rights abusers?**

The PSC members who have worked on and supported this resolution have multiple political commitments and are passionate about a variety of political issues. PSC committees, chapters, and delegates are free to bring resolutions on any topic to the Delegate Assembly for discussion. If enough delegates agree with them, such resolutions may be approved. There is nothing about the June 10 resolution on Palestine that precludes future resolutions on human rights abuses anywhere in the world.

This particular resolution is an act of solidarity with a specific call put out by Palestinian labor unions and civil society organizations. When Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers called for a boycott of grapes in 1965, it did not make sense to ask “but what about apples?”

The fact is, the United States government provides Israel with advanced weapons, unconditional diplomatic support, and billions of dollars of annual assistance, far more than it does to any other state. As trade unionists based in the United States, who pay taxes to the U.S. government, we therefore have a particular responsibility to take up the cause of Palestinian freedom to ensure that our tax dollars do not enable and abet violations of human rights and international law, especially in Israel as the largest recipient of US military aid.

#### **Q14. Why doesn't the resolution condemn Hamas?**

The resolution is an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination. It would not make sense for the resolution to name any specific Palestinian political organizations, just as it does not mention any specific Israeli political organizations; Israel's brutal system of occupation and apartheid pre-dates the creation of Hamas and has been constant across multiple political regimes for decades. A “both sides” narrative erases the military, economic, media, and global power that Israel has over Palestine and conceals the meaningful differences between one of the most heavily militarized states in the world—that receives \$3.8 billion of military aid annually from the United States—and a Palestinian population resisting colonial occupation and oppression.

#### **Q15. How can PSC members get involved?**

The Resolution calls on all chapters to discuss the content of the Resolution in Support of the Palestinian People and report back on these conversations to the Delegate Assembly by the end of 2021. Here's how you can help:

- Tell your chapter chair and executive committee members that you support the resolution and are proud to see your union taking a stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- Get involved in your PSC chapter to help organize conversations about how BDS can help fight apartheid in Israel.
- Sign onto the [CUNY Community Statement of Solidarity with the Palestinian People](#) so PSC members working on this issue can reach out to you for next steps.
- Get involved with organizations working to promote BDS on campus and in the wider CUNY community like [CUNY4Palestine](#), [Jewish Voice for Peace](#), and [Students for Justice in Palestine](#).
- Support student groups doing decolonial and anti-racist work on campus, including [Free CUNY](#), [CUNY for Abolition and Safety](#), and campus student associations such as CUNY Law's Jewish Law Students Association and Muslim Student Associations on different CUNY campuses.
- Join organizations like [Labor for Palestine](#) to find out about [pickets and other labor actions in support of BDS](#).