



**Opening Remarks, AEN National Conference, May 25, 2016**

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I want to begin by thanking Ken, Mike, Mark, and Lisa, along with everyone else who helped make this remarkable and timely conference possible. This will be a unique opportunity to learn from one another and to build an important coalition that can sustain us in the continuing battles we face.

Since this is the opening panel, I want to begin by summarizing where we are in the struggle against the boycott movement. By now I think we know why BDS is so counter-productive. It demonizes Israel and uncritically idealizes the Palestinians, thereby undercutting the possibility that both groups can achieve enough mutual empathy to work together to negotiate a solution to the conflict. Across the world, BDS leaders are clear about the movement's fundamental goal—the elimination of the Jewish state. From Omar Barghouti to Judith Butler they say so unequivocally in lectures and in print. The fact that they do not say so on their web site does not change the fact of such consistent witness from BDS's most prominent spokespersons. Indeed BDS has never mounted a campaign to change specific Israeli government policies. Worse still, it has no peace plan, no agenda for how to move forward. Its message of hate is its only contribution to contemporary political debate.

Yet even that is not the most cruel feature of the BDS movement. Its most cruel feature is that it offers nothing to the Palestinians it claims to champion—neither short term nor long term. BDS succeeds among some who are more devoted to their own need for self-gratifying slogans than they are for improving Palestinian lives. In fact, BDS's anti-normalization campaign seeks to indict the very interchanges between Israelis and Palestinians that are necessary if daily life on the West Bank is to be enhanced.

BDS campaigns often target some of the very efforts to limit Palestinian suffering. Let's take one example. BDS has repeatedly proposed divesting from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett Packard, three companies deemed to be profiting from Israel's military occupation of the West Bank. Of these, HP is the most interesting example. Hewlett-Packard sells Israel software and produces biometric I.D. cards for both Israelis and Palestinians. The I.D. cards are actually designed to facilitate and speed the flow of Palestinians through West Bank checkpoints; one benefit is that they eliminate more intrusive physical contact between Palestinians and the soldiers monitoring the checkpoints. The smart card system was developed with support from the US and the European Union and was reflected in an agreement between Israel and the

Palestinian Authority. Given that the checkpoints are not going to disappear so long as Israel continues to have security concerns, HP's product is actually devoted to making Palestinian lives easier. Is the company's willingness to do business with Israeli military authorities sufficient grounds for moral outrage even if it enhances daily life for Palestinians?

Just recently two reports were published linking three subjects—how to enhance Israel's security, how to improve the quality of Palestinians' lives, and how to move safely and gradually toward a two-state solution. HP plays a role in all this. One of the reports was produced by a group of over 200 retired Israeli generals, Shin Bet executives, and senior police officials. It recommends increasing acquisition of Palestinian biometric data, and—get this—sharing it with the Palestinian and Jordanian security services. Then they want Israel to establish fast lanes through checkpoints—like the TSA pre-approved pre-check lines at American airports—so Palestinians pre-approved to visit or work in Israel will no longer have to wait hours to transit. Mind you, of the tens of thousands of Palestinians who have been vetted and approved to enter Israel only one is on record having participated in violence. The stabbings and shootings, like the horrific attack that just took place in Tel Aviv, are carried out by Palestinians entering through gaps in the security fence, gaps by the way that Israel should fill.

Making the checkpoints far less burdensome would go a long way toward improving the quality of life on the West Bank, reducing resentment against Israel, and building the good will necessary for peace. One of the recurrent BDS strategies in Christian churches, by the way, is to invoke the phrase “Christ at the Checkpoint,” suggesting the image of Roman soldiers and holy suffering. But I don't hear any “Christ in O'Hare airport lines” slogan, so making the checkpoints easy and routine for most would be a great way to defuse this piece of BDS propaganda. Of course you have to learn these things if you want to combat BDS effectively. I could go through many issues like this to give you good counter-arguments; these arguments exist. I think they are persuasive. Hewlett Packard is not the devil. The devil is BDS. By demonizing Hewlett Packard and every effort to make progress it effectively seeks to keep the Palestinians miserable. It is helped in this process by the delusional humanism of Americans who assume biometric monitoring is necessarily a surveillance procedure that belongs in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

If we are to change the fruitless character of so many discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we have to begin putting forward practical solutions that help reduce tensions in Palestine and increase confidence in the principles underwriting a two-state solution.