

LA Jews for Peace Statement in Opposition to the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, S-720 & HR-1697.

Los Angeles, August 3, 2017, modified August 15, 2017

LA Jews for Peace supports Israel's right to exist, but opposes the Israel Anti-Boycott Act (S-720 & HR-1697).

First Amendment Argument: The ACLU opposes S-720/HR-1697 on First Amendment grounds¹. The ACLU takes no position on a boycott of Israel or any other state. But the ACLU notes that the proposed bills have no penalty for boycotting Israel unless the boycott is politically motivated. That led ACLU to "assert that the government cannot, consistent with the First Amendment, punish U.S. persons [for boycotting Israel] based solely on their expressed political beliefs." The ACLU also points out that even seeking information about boycotts of Israel may expose an American citizen to criminal penalties.

It's the Occupation: One of the motivations for S-720/HR-1697 is to protect Israel, America's ally, from having its reputation tarnished. But the major factor harming Israel's reputation is its 50-year occupation that expropriates Palestinian land and deprives 4.5 million Palestinians of humanity, dignity, and political and economic rights. Indeed, the occupation is the specific target of most church boycotts of companies that profit from the occupation. The effect of fringe BDS activities pales compared to the occupation. Rather than punish BDS activists, Congress would help Israel more by enacting sanctions on Israel until it ends its occupation of Palestine.

A Better Way: Pro-Israel groups like J Street² and Americans for Peace Now (APN)³ oppose both BDS and S-720/HR-1697. They say those bills are the wrong way to fight BDS because they do not distinguish between Israel proper and the illegal settlements in occupied territory. J Street says "It doesn't help the pro-Israel cause to trample free speech and blur the Green Line. Criminalizing speech is no way to win the argument against the BDS Movement."

LA Jews for Peace joins the ACLU and pro-peace groups J Street and APN in opposing the Israel Anti-Boycott Act (S-720 & HR-1697).

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/letter/aclu-letter-senate-opposing-israel-anti-boycott-act>

² <http://jstreet.org/press-releases/statement-new-legislation-related-bds/#.WYOhJ4jytPZ>

³ <http://peacenow.org/entry.php?id=24617#.WYOgGljytPY>