

Testimony for the New York City Council Contracts Committee

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Upon invitation by City Council Member Andrew Cohen*

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. My name is Michael Miller and I am the Executive Vice President and CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, which represents more than 60 local Jewish organizations in New York City, Westchester, and Long Island.

I am here to speak in favor of the passage of Proposed Resolution No. 1058-A – “A resolution condemning all efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and the global movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction the people of Israel.”

I want to thank all the Council Members who have cosponsored this important resolution and specifically commend Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Andrew (Andy) Cohen, and the Chair of the Jewish Caucus, Council Member Mark Levine, whose efforts have been instrumental in bringing this matter before us today.

The relationship between the City of New York and the State of Israel is deep and ever-evolving. As the city with the largest Jewish population anywhere in the world, many New Yorkers share great interest and concern for developments impacting on Israel’s safety, security and viability. As the Holy Land, Israel is not only central to the Jewish faith but also to Christianity and Islam. Jesus walked and preached in the Holy Land, from the Galilee to Jerusalem, and it is where the Prophet Muhammad preached and ascended to heaven.

Beyond faith, New Yorkers and Israelis share many values. Israel and the United States are two vibrant and robust democracies. As such, Israelis and New Yorkers both actively participate in their political discourse and drive progress and change. We each make it a priority to ensure that our poor are elevated, our hungry are fed, our sick are cared for, and that each person, regardless of race or the color of their skin, has equal rights and privileges enshrined in law. In fact, Israel is the only country outside of the United States that commemorates Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And as we are but three days from the 15th anniversary of the devastating September 11th attacks, it is particularly meaningful to note that the Israeli Memorial to the Victims of 9/11 was unveiled several years ago in a picturesque setting on the outskirts of Jerusalem. At that time, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro stood at that haunting structure, which lists the names of all of the victims, and reminded us that: “Here, at this painfully beautiful memorial site, we are a reminder to everyone that we, Americans and Israelis, stand together in a spirit of solidarity and commitment to the future.”

That spirit is non-partisan. One need not be a member of a particular faith or political party to support the U.S.-Israel relationship. This is not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue. It’s an American issue. Together, we must maintain this relationship, as successive U.S. administrations have demonstrated. It is this issue, today, which the resolution before you reaffirms.

Speaking of reaffirming, it is also reaffirming that over the last 15 years, active commercial ties between New York and Israel have blossomed in a wide range of industries. Hundreds of Israeli companies are publicly traded on the major exchanges here in New York. The Cornell-Technion Campus on Roosevelt Island will soon benefit our students, our economy, and the whole of society. American musicians regularly perform in Israel and Israeli cultural icons often entertain here in New York. And each year, our city and state ship more than \$5 billion worth of exports to Israel.

Over the last decade, the State of Israel has been a victim of economic warfare in the form of a well-orchestrated and well-funded campaign to delegitimize the world's only Jewish and Democratic state. Activists from all around the world – including here in America – have sought to cripple Israel through BDS: Boycotts of Israeli products; Divestment from Israeli companies and, more importantly, American companies doing business in Israel; and the imposition of a global Sanctions regime upon Israel. The BDS movement has successfully intimidated supporters of Israel in several arenas, including the arts, culture, corporations, academia, churches, grocery stores, pension funds, investment firms, and many more. While the movement's leaders claim they wish to open an "honest discussion about Israel," its activists have publicly shouted down Israeli speakers, disrupted Israel-focused events, and rejected applications from pro-Israel scholars to participate in academic panels concerning Israel. So much for open discourse.

But why is Israel targeted? The propaganda spewed by such activists claims that the purpose of the BDS Movement is to pressure Israel into ending its occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. However, upon further examination of the BDS movement's stated goals, it is clear that it's actually not interested in merely providing the Palestinians with an independent state alongside Israel. Rather, BDS is actively seeking to replace the Jewish state with a Palestinian state. 70 years ago, after the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, the world woke up and understood the imperative for the establishment of a Jewish state as a haven and homeland – the need for the Jewish people to be in control of their own destiny. Over the years, Arab armies, Arab boycotts, and Arab terrorism have been used to try to exterminate the Jewish state, but all have failed. Now, in an era when the last survivors of Hitler's Holocaust are passing away, malevolent individuals, under the guise of pursuing Palestinian self-determination, are seeking to deprive the Jewish people of that very same right to self-determination. That is a highly discriminatory and anti-Jewish double standard.

As the resolution here implies, peace in the Middle East depends on both Israelis and Palestinians working together toward the mutual goal of a negotiated two-state solution. Two states for two peoples. In contrast, BDS tactics are one-sided and are focused solely on eliminating Israel. BDS turns a blind eye to Palestinian actions which seek to undermine a two-state solution, such as terrorism, indiscriminate rocket fire on civilian areas, repeated refusals to negotiate for peace, and unfortunate rejections of Israeli offers for Palestinian statehood. Rather than focusing on improving the situation for both peoples, BDS activists sabotage the internationally-backed peace process that is premised on advancing mutual understanding and respect between the parties.

Economic boycotts and divestment actions will not help the Palestinian people. The path to the two-state solution depends on creating an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation combined with economic development and political achievement. Blocking that path is the BDS Movement.

If you believe in the right of the Jewish people to be safe and secure in their historic homeland, I urge you to support this resolution.

If you believe in the right of the Palestinian people to their own state alongside, but not instead of, Israel, I urge you to support this resolution.

If you believe in a true peace process and oppose divisive, destructive tactics that attempt to cripple our ally Israel, I urge you to support this resolution.

If you believe that together, we can play a constructive role in ensuring that Israelis and Palestinians can work toward achieving mutual understanding, cooperation, and a better future for themselves, their children, and their grandchildren, I urge you to support this resolution.

Thank you.