

NORMALIZATION AND ANTI-NORMALIZATION



Despite the persistent presence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is much that can be done to foster mutually beneficial relations between Israelis and Palestinians. There are many NGOs engaged in activities that seek to enhance respect on both sides and contribute to the quality of life for all those living in the region. Yet, many anti-Israel activists, including the BDS movement, attempt to stand in the way of such progress by making reference to resisting “**normalization**.”

ANTI-ISRAEL ACTIVISTS HAVE DEFINED NORMALIZATION AS:

“[T]he participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people.”

Anti-Israel activists around the globe support a policy of **anti-normalization**, rejecting any form of dialogue, collaboration, or partnership with those that are supportive of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state. Such a posture promotes antagonism, silences discussion and human interaction, and makes the dream of permanent peace that much more difficult to attain.

THE IMPACT

The negative impact of anti-normalization is felt most acutely in Israel and the Palestinian territories, where it makes life more dire by disrupting on-the-ground NGO initiatives. For example, anti-normalization is why Palestinian professor Mohammed Dajani was condemned as a traitor for bringing a group of students to visit Auschwitz. Believing that education is the key to breaking the cycle of violence, he faced death threats, lost his job, and ultimately moved to America.

The effects of anti-normalization are also felt in the United States, where it is utilized on college campuses. Groups like Students for Justice in Palestine often refuse to work with any group or student unless that group or student first agrees to condemn Israel. This ostracizes not only pro-Israel groups, but also Jewish students who are more apolitical but identify with Israel as a central part of their faith and culture.

While ostensibly flying under the banner of being pro-Palestinian, the anti-normalization campaign, in reality, has had the biggest damaging impact on Palestinian society. Anti-normalization deprives Palestinians opportunities to advance in many socioeconomic and educational spheres, distances it from potential allies, and does damage to academic freedom. It is only through dialogue, intellectual exchange, and encountering “the other” that Palestinians and Israelis will be able to work together to overcome the conflict and set a path toward a more peaceful future.