

Updates: bank account of BDS Austria closed by bank as a result of political pressure

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The global movement supporting the Palestinian people's right to freedom, justice and equality has taken impressive steps into the political mainstream in recent years. Efforts by the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement to hold Israel accountable for its serious violations of international law and to end international complicity in these violations are more widely supported and more impactful than ever before.

Israel's current government, its most racist ever, has dropped all pretences of "enlightenment" and "democracy". This has helped to expose Israel's regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid to world public opinion like never before. In this context and given the fast spread of BDS in recent years, Israel has tried hard but failed to slow down its gradually intensifying international isolation in the academic, cultural, sports and - to a lesser extent, economic sphere.

As a result Israel, its lobby groups and its right-wing supporters have launched an unprecedented, well-funded global campaign to silence Palestinian narratives, to defame and to criminalize BDS advocacy, especially in western countries.

One aspect of this Israeli campaign is the attempt through political pressure and defamation to encourage banks to dissolve accounts of Palestinian solidarity organizations and BDS groups. Benjamin Weinthal, an Israeli journalist and employee of the neo-conservative US think-tank "Foundation for Defense of Democracies", plays a leading role in such campaigns. Weinthal's procedure always follows the same pattern: Affected agencies or institutions are contacted and confronted with false defamatory allegations about the group, organization or NGO in question.

After that, Weinthal writes one or more articles for the Jerusalem Post, for which he works as a European correspondent, by which media pressure is established. Local media grab the story because of their perceived or real news value and the pressurized institutions (city governments, banks, etc.) must respond. Those can - as shown by the example of the city council of Bayreuth - withstand the pressure and reject the defamation as such or succumb in order to avert an alleged "loss of image" or "loss of reputation".

In his defamatory attempt to obtain the release of bank accounts, Benjamin Weinthal has been successful. Direkt Anlage Bank GmbH (DAB Bank) terminated without further explanation an account of the BDS campaign in Germany. Even the Palestine Committee Stuttgart was threatened with termination of their bank account. At the same time Erste Bank urged us for weeks to remove the account details from our BDS Austria website and our Facebook page and no longer use it as an account for donation. Even after the intervention of the Erste Bank Ombudsman and a detailed personal interview with the bank supervisor, no results were achieved in order to sustain the account. According to Bank Managers, no official statement can be given explaining the procedure.

We therefore are obliged to cancel the account and until further notice will not have any bank account. Those of you who want to support our work financially can of course continue to do so. Financial support for the BDS-work is always welcome and for further information on how to do so please don't hesitate to contact us via email or facebook message.

Related links to articles and statements (mixed German/English):

<http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Austrian-bank-engulfed-in-anti-Semitism-dispute-over-BDS-account-449722>

<http://diepresse.com/home/wirtschaft/international/4963696/New-Yorker-Ungemach-fur-die-Erste>

<http://bds-kampagne.de/2016/02/29/exklusiv-bds-kampagne-bedankt-sich-bei-der-jerusalem-post-und-benjamin-weinthal/>

https://senderfreiespalaestina.de/pdfs/statement_dtsch_abu_sitta_veranstaltung.pdf

<http://bds-kampagne.de/2016/03/18/israels-juristischer-angriff-auf-die-bds-bewegung-fuehrt-weltweit-zu-repression-und-mccarthyismus/>

<http://www.heise.de/tp/news/US-Aktivisten-trotz-heftiger-Kritik-in-Bayreuth-ausgezeichnet-3177904.html>