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Haaretz | Opinion

# Why [a key BDS group] Can't Tolerate Jews and Palestinians in Israel Standing Together

Saturday 3 February 2024, by [NECHIN Etan](#) (Date first published: 31 January 2024).

**Standing Together is a fast-growing grassroots movements in Israel bringing Jews and Arabs together. It confronts the occupation, it's at the forefront of protests against the Gaza war, it visits the families of hostages. And now a key BDS group is calling to boycott it**

One of the largest and fastest growing grassroots movements in Israel is one that brings Jewish and Arab citizens together. It is called Standing Together, in Hebrew, Omdim Beyhad, and most recently, it's been on the forefront of protests against the Gaza War within Israel.

But that has not stopped a Palestinian faction within the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement to use this most charged of moments [to target the group](#), the most prominent organizational voice within Israel calling for a cease-fire and the one doing the most to bring together Israelis together in the struggle for equality, justice and an end to the occupation.

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) described Standing Together [in a statement](#) on the BDS official website last week as "an Israeli normalization outfit that seeks to distract from and whitewash Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza."

In response Palestinian members of Standing Together's national leadership, [wrote a statement](#) firing back on Tuesday:

"We actively campaign against Israel's oppressive regime and have made specific efforts to increase the visibility of atrocities committed by Israeli in Gaza...despite the risk involved in doing so," the statement reads. "It is disheartening to be silenced by other pro-Palestinian groups at a time when we are being silenced and persecuted by the Israeli government and Israeli institutions for fighting for the lives of our people. We are proud to organize Palestinians and Jews together."

Most Israeli left-wing groups offered solidarity while, the Israeli right responded with a sense of [self-justification](#), suggesting the Israeli left should sober up to the fact that the whole world is against us.

After almost four months of a brutal war, massacres, displacements and failed leadership, Standing Together is a rare and welcome showcase of the benefits of grassroots solidarity activities over ideological battles.

*Protesters at anti-war protest in Tel Aviv hold signs printed by Standing Together that read in Hebrew and Arabic, "Only peace will bring security."*

[Standing Together, which notably maintains an ethos of radical empathy](#) in our polarized times, has publicly criticized the occupation, called out Israel's rule in the West Bank as apartheid, and has

protested the blockade of Gaza.

It was a prominent force in the “anti-occupation bloc” during protests against judicial overhaul in Israel. The group has faced police crackdowns for organizing protests against the war. Post-October 7, it set up a legal aid hotline for Palestinians and left-wing activists, organized food packages for Jewish, Muslim and Christian families in mixed cities who are struggling financially since the war broke out. It has also set up “solidarity guards” of local Jews and Arabs who meet for dialogue and together do outreach like visiting families with loved ones have been taken hostage and meeting with Jewish-Arab medical teams at hospitals, cleaned out bomb shelters, among other joint actions. Their new slogan is: “Together we will get through this”.

The movement has only grown since October 7, but there are plenty of people hostile to their message as well. Recently, Israeli Army Radio pulled an interview with co-director Alon-Lee Green after right-wing pushback hours before it was scheduled to air.

Boycotting, is a valid form of non-violent protest. We can see it embraced by some Israelis themselves against Jewish settlement products and the settlements themselves. It aligns with leftist principles, and in the case of BDS, advocates for non-normalization of Israel and its institutions.

Yet, for those who see a shared future in the land, uniting and striving for a common future is the only way forward. No Standing Together member is trying to “normalize” past or present policies by Israel’s governments: taking to the streets before and after October 7<sup>th</sup> is a testament to that.

BDS was created as a call from Palestinian civil society to disengage with Israeli institutions because of the ongoing occupation.

However, the call for Israeli-Palestinian solidarity is also rooted in appeals from within the Palestinian community as well, across the divide of the Green Line. Palestinian society, like any community, isn’t monolithic. Nor are Israelis either. In Standing Together, there are many anti-occupation activists, those supporting Israeli human rights groups like Breaking and the Silence and B’Tselem and those who have also supported tactics of the BDS.

This variety indicates that support for the Palestinian cause isn’t restricted to a single path; there are numerous ways to contribute to ending the occupation and promoting Palestinian self-determination.

The problem with the BDS isn’t the tactic [itself, but that as a movement it slides into historic essentialism](#). Israel isn’t only defined by the absolute worst policies and crimes; its existence is conditional because of them. And this means it can never make right its crimes; its citizens can never be redeemed.

As Sally Abed, a Palestinian member of Standing Together’s leadership said in [Dissent Magazine](#), “One of the problems with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign is that it assumes that Israeli society can’t change. And by assuming that it can’t change, important conversations between Israelis and Palestinians don’t happen anymore.”

Critiques may arise regarding specific tactics or messages, but generally, the supporters of Standing Together — who are part of Israel’s tight-knit society and can also be found in the ranks of many parties and movements— have shared objectives.

Standing Together has grown in strength and members managed to gain acceptance in [certain mainstream circles](#). And while not a political group, it has worked to get people out to vote. When a movement grows momentum, it naturally faces more scrutiny—from both Jews and Palestinians.

Even more so in a society whose mainstream has gone more nationalistic.

Of course, for the Palestinian citizens of Israel in the group, this is felt much more intensely. As Abed reflected in a [Jewish Currents podcast](#), “I have never felt that I have such little space to express myself, ever.”

A key concept of solidarity is the importance of gathering political strength for the most vulnerable to express themselves and ideally without facing backlash. This means building a network.

Ariel Angel, editor-in-chief of Jewish Currents, stressed the significance of inclusivity in forming coalitions. Addressing critique of participants at a ceasefire rally for labeling Israel as committing genocide, she remarked in [the same podcast](#) that, “we can’t litmus test them on whether they are saying the right things in the moment.”



*Standing Together co-directors Rula Daood and Alon-Lee Green. “Joining the movement became a life-changing journey for me,” Daood says. Credit: Tomer Appelbaum*

If it’s wrong to apply a [litmus test to those who label Israel’s actions as genocide](#) then wouldn’t it be similarly questionable to impose such a test on calls for Israelis and Palestinians to collaborate in seeking power and solidarity?

The point is the focus should be on fostering dialogue and unity rather than setting rigid benchmarks for participation or support.

Solidarity means trying to engage even when the other is reluctant. So it’s legitimate for those who want to boycott Standing Together as well as it is those who seek to find common ground.

Boycott is an act of withdrawal, of not consuming, of not buying the ticket. Boycott should be one of many tools in our arsenal for social change, especially against official institutions and large companies.

Standing Together shows there’s another way to try to make progress, one which is participatory, active, not from the remove of any ideological stance, but a recognition even though we are in different social and political positions, we are all in the same boat. It’s offering solidarity with those who face the most oppression, violence, subjugation, and alienation.

As Standing Together’s co-director Rula Daood said on the left-wing [Majority FM podcast](#), “How much more blood will be spilled before we understand that the fate of Israelis and Palestinians is interconnected? That it’s either we all live in a peace and freedom or none of us will?”

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**P.S.**

- Haaretz. Jan 31, 2024:

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-01-31/ty-article-opinion/.premium/why-bds-cant-tolerate-jews-and-palestinians-in-israel-standing-together/0000018d-5f07-d4f8-a9df-5f2f88ca0000>

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