

Israeli Ban on South African Cabinet Minister Boosts Boycott Campaign

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Israel's ban on the visit of a South African cabinet minister to the occupied West Bank has stirred up a diplomatic row and given a boost to the [boycott, divestment and sanctions](#) (BDS) campaign.

Shortly before higher education minister Blade Nzimande was due to lead a delegation to visit [Birzeit University](#) near Ramallah and discuss academic cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli embassy in Pretoria denied him a visa.

"The Israeli government is trying by all means to hide their atrocities against the Palestinian people, and minimize the number of people who can actually see what is happening on the ground," Nzimande [told South Africa's Independent Media](#) on Thursday.

A spokesperson for South Africa's Ministry of Higher Education [said](#) Israel denied Nzimande a visa because he was "one of the most vocal anti-Israeli government ministers."

The incident was a "serious diplomatic problem," the spokesperson added.

Academic boycott

In response, Nzimande is urging all South African universities and colleges to cut their ties with Israeli academic institutions, according to *Independent Media*.

Israel tries "to subvert academic freedom, which cannot be tolerated," Nzimande added.

Over the past few years, the South African government, the ruling [African National Congress](#) (ANC) and its partner the South African Communist Party (of which Nzimande is secretary-general) have intensified their pressure on Israel.

The ANC [adopted the Palestinian call for BDS as official policy](#) in 2012.

The government also decided that [products](#) from [Israeli settlements](#) in the occupied West Bank, which are illegal under international law, should be [labeled](#) as originating from "Israeli-occupied territories" rather than "Made in Israel."

Deputy international relations minister [Ebrahim Ebrahim](#) has also [discouraged](#) South Africans from visiting Israel "because of the treatment and policies of Israel towards the Palestinian people."

Recently, several government officials, including Nzimande, [publicly expressed their support](#) for the campaign against retail giant [Woolworths](#) over its sales of products from Israel.

“Worse than South African apartheid”

Nzimande’s support for the Palestinian struggle is not rooted only in the common experiences of Black South Africans and Palestinians resisting colonizers. The minister witnessed the impact of the occupation on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip first hand in 2002, during the second intifada.

“In many respects I felt that Israeli apartheid is worse than South African apartheid,” Nzimande recalled in a public forum last August during Israel’s assault on Gaza that left more than 2,200 Palestinians dead (see video at the top of this post).

Speaking alongside Israeli historian [Ilan Pappé](#) and South African anti-apartheid veteran [Farid Esack](#), Nzimande added: “We are outraged as the South African Communist Party and the government in particular at the continuous vicious campaign waged by the State of Israel on the Palestinian people who have clearly been massacred for the crime of demanding the return of their land and self-determination.”

Nzimande also urged that South Africa recall its ambassador from Tel Aviv and expel Israel’s envoy from Pretoria.

Meanwhile, a broad South African coalition for Palestine, uniting political parties, trade unions, solidarity groups, student bodies and faith organizations, continues to advocate for boycott, divestment and sanctions.

The [termination of contracts](#) by twenty South African businesses with prison and security profiteer [G4S](#) over its role in Israeli prisons and human rights abuses is their latest success.

Nzimande’s call on South African universities to cut their ties with Israeli academic institutions certainly gives the campaign a major boost.

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