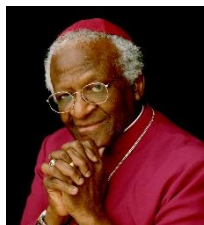


# Archbishop Desmond Tutu: Maryland legislature's anti-boycott effort designed to 'punish and intimidate'

April 2014



I am writing today to express grave concern about a wave of legislative measures in the United States aimed at punishing and intimidating those who speak their conscience and challenge the human rights violations endured by the Palestinian people. In legislatures in Maryland, New York, Illinois, Florida, and even the United States Congress, bills have been proposed that would either bar funding to academic associations or seek to malign those who have taken a stand against the Israeli

Occupation of Palestine.

These legislative efforts are in response to a growing international initiative, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, of which I have long been a supporter. The BDS movement emanates from a call for justice put out by the Palestinian people themselves. It is a Palestinian-led, international non-violent movement that seeks to force the Israeli government to comply with international law in respect to its treatment of the Palestinian people.

I have supported this movement because it exerts pressure without violence on the State of Israel to create lasting peace for the citizens of Israel and Palestine, peace which most citizens crave. I have witnessed the systematic violence against and humiliation of Palestinian men, women and children by members of the Israeli security forces. Their humiliation and pain is all too familiar to us South Africans.

In South Africa, we could not have achieved our democracy without the help of people around the world, who through the use of non-violent means, such as boycotts and divestment, encouraged their governments and other corporate actors to reverse decades-long support for the Apartheid regime. My conscience compels me to stand with the Palestinians as they seek to use the same tactics of non-violence to further their efforts to end the oppression associated with the Israeli Occupation.

The legislations being proposed in the United States would have made participation in a movement like the one that ended Apartheid in South Africa extremely difficult.

I am also deeply troubled by the rhetoric associated with the promulgation of these bills which I understand, in the instance of Maryland, included testimony comparing the boycott to the actions of the Nazis in Germany. The Nazi Holocaust which resulted in the extermination of millions of Jews is a crime of monstrous proportions. To imply that it is in any way comparable to a nonviolent initiative diminishes the horrific nature of that genocidal and tragic era in our world history.

Whether used in South Africa, the US South, or India, boycotts have resulted in a transformative change that not only brought freedom and justice to the victims but also peace and reconciliation for the oppressors. I strongly oppose any piece of legislation meant to punish or deter individuals from pursuing this transformative aspiration. And I remain forever hopeful that, like the nonviolent efforts that have preceded it, the BDS movement will ultimately become a catalyst for honest peace and reconciliation for all our brothers and sisters, both Palestinian and Israeli, in the Holy Land.

*Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu*



March 10, 2026

**HB1460: State Procurement - Prohibited Certifications - Boycotts of Foreign Countries**  
**Request: Favorable Report**

Chair Pena Melnyk and Committee members

The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize for challenging apartheid in South Africa. In the letter I provided in my written testimony, he says “In South Africa, we could not have achieved our democracy without the help of people around the world, who through the use of non-violent means, such as boycotts and divestment. His letter advocates support to the BDS movement and he has openly referenced Israel as an Apartheid regime.

But there is one particularly interesting sentence in his open letter. He calls out a Maryland elected official for his rhetoric in trying to get anti-BDS legislation passed here. With that letter that went around the globe, our State became the poster child of censorship and oppression of human rights activists challenging Israel’s illegal occupation and violence against Palestinians.

But what most of the public doesn’t know, is the elected officials who were in the same seats you are sitting in now, actually never passed the anti-BDS legislation. The Israeli lobby tried 3 times to pass a bill and your predecessors refused. Entities like the ACLU which was then run by now Senator Sarah Love and leadership at the University of Maryland testified with scores of Marylanders from all walks of life to say no to suppressing free speech. Senator Mary Washington, then a delegate spoke up against the proposed anti-BDS bill.

But Governor Larry Hogan bypassed all the public outcry and your predecessors to instead issue an executive order passing the anti-BDS legislation.

So there are two legacies here and you can choose which one you are aligned with. The status quo which was a byproduct of Israeli lobbyists bypassing public and democratic processes or you could reverse the prohibition and stand with your predecessors and all the Marylanders who testified from 2014-2017. I request that you issue a favorable report.