

# *More than 290 U.S. Universities and Major Churches to Join Anti-Israel Boycott Campaign*

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Washington, August 5 (RHC)-- The anti-Israel boycott campaign in the United States is gaining momentum as more American academic institutions and Christian religious organizations join the movement to protest Tel Aviv's oppression of Palestinians.

The boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel, known as BDS, is preparing to launch the widest boycott campaign against Israel, which will include student councils from 293 American universities and a renowned Protestant church.

BDS activists expect the United Methodist Church, which has nearly eight million members in the U.S., to join the movement next year, underscoring the growing momentum of the U.S. protest movement against Israel.

Activists preparing for the BDS campaign said in a statement that they are aiming to turn universities and churches to platforms that support Palestinian rights.

A BDS member said the United Methodist Church, which is part of the Protestant denomination, will hold a conference in May next year in the state of Oregon to decide about whether to boycott Israel.

The boycott campaign against Israel began in July 2005 by 171 Palestinian organizations, calling for "various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law." The movement seeks to end the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian lands and respect the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

The United Church of Christ, the largest Christian Protestant denomination in the United States, voted last month to boycott products from Israeli settlements and divest from companies with business in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his subordinates have called the BDS campaign a new form of terrorism to delegitimize Israel.

Supporters of the movement, however, including a growing number of American Jews, have called such criticism a divisive tactic meant to prevent legitimate debate about the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands.

Jewish Voice for Peace, an advocacy group based in Oakland, California, has endorsed the BDS movement. "Progressives are speaking up, and it's only a matter of time until Israel is held accountable for its human rights abuses and violations of international law," Lev Hirschhorn, a board member of Jewish Voice for Peace, said in a statement in July.

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