

Profile: Ads Against Apartheid

“Ads Against Apartheid” or “It’s Apartheid, Inc.” is a newly-founded group that actively works to place anti-Israel advertisements in various outlets throughout the U.S. such as subways, buses, newspapers, billboards, and television commercials. The group, which is based out of Cambridge, Massachusetts, describes Israel as an apartheid state that is engaged in a consortium of human rights violations against the Palestinians. They are looking to spread that message to the American public by running advertisements in public spaces and on social media websites.

The group has placed ads in cities across the U.S., including in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, and Los Angeles. In May 2014, for example, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) approved a series of their subway ads that accused Israel of building “JEWISH-ONLY cities inside Palestine, using U.S. tax dollars” and alleged that, “Since September, 2000 ISRAEL’S MILITARY has killed one Palestinian child every 4 days, using U.S. tax dollars.”

Ads Against Apartheid also sponsored another set of billboards with similar messages in Dallas, Texas and Chicago, Illinois in September 2014. Those ads suggested that Israel is not interested in achieving peace with the Palestinians and that it is guilty of stealing Palestinian land. Although the billboards were not identical in text, the messaging was quite similar with the one in Dallas stating, “When a Country STEALS Land Does it Really Want Peace? End Israeli Apartheid Now.”

They also funded another campaign in Los Angeles in December 2014, which featured 30 billboards and used a quote attributed to Nelson Mandela about attaining freedom for the Palestinian people. Richard Colbath-Hess, a co-founder of the group, spoke about the campaign and stated that, “It is important for Americans to understand where Palestinians’ frustration comes from...Israel is applying increasingly brutal force...There is no security-based solution to what is, at its core, a civil and human rights problem.”

Although the group received its non-profit status in 2012, they did not really become active until August 2013, when they established pages on social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Through these pages, they began to disseminate anti-Israel news articles and information about their upcoming campaigns. They also led a fundraising campaign through the platform “Indiegogo,” which raised to over \$100,000.

Some members of the group’s Advisory Board have a history of making anti-Israel and, at times anti-Semitic statements. One of the members of the group’s Advisory Board is Mazin Qumsiyeh, a conspiratorial anti-Israel activist who has a history of making anti-Semitic statements. Statements attributed to Qumsiyeh include allegations that Israel’s actions at times have been comparable to Nazi Germany and, around the time of the 2013 Boston Marathon attacks, Qumsiyeh alleged that the Mossad may have played a part in them.

Other members of the Ads Against Apartheid Advisory Board are Diana Buttu, a former spokesperson for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and a political analyst at the Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU); Pam Rogers, a Steering Committee member of Jewish Voice for Peace; Sami Awad, the Executive Director of the Holy Land Trust; and Elaine Hagopian, Professor Emerita at Simmons College.

Members of the management team also have a history of being involved with anti-Israel activism. For example, Sofia Wolman, the group's Community Organizer, previously helped to create a BDS campaign against Israel in 2011 for the group Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine at Earlham College. The campaign called on Earlham College to divest from companies such as Motorola, Hewlett Packard, and Caterpillar, but it was not successful.

Richard Colbath-Hess, a co-founder of the group, previously created and ran a website called "ItsApartheid.org." The website was created in 2008 and his stated goal was, "to use the tools of the internet and ingenuity of its readers to spread the word about Apartheid in the Israeli Occupied Territories." The other co-founder of the group, Chadi Salamoun has also been involved with anti-Israel activism and was the host of a radio show called "This Week in Palestine." Salamoun also ran a website called IsareliPalestineNews.com for several years that featured news articles about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.