

Rt. Hon Joan Ryan MP

House of Commons

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11 December 2017

Kate Osamor MP
Shadow Secretary of State for International Development
House of Commons
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Dear Kate,

I was very concerned to see your Tweet on Saturday seemingly endorsing the BDS movement and your Retweet on Sunday of a Tweet from BDS South Africa.

The BDS movement is morally wrong. It seeks to demonise and delegitimise the world's only Jewish state and thus call into question its right to exist.

BDS also does nothing to advance the cause of peace, reconciliation and coexistence. The BDS campaign undermines the work of those Israelis – including our sister party, the Israeli Labor party – who are seeking to advance a two-state solution. It also ignores consistent evidence from opinion polling showing Israeli public support for a two-state solution.

By placing sole responsibility on Israel, the BDS movement ignores the complexities of the conflict and purposefully overlooks the fact that the issues at the heart of it – especially land and security – can only be resolved at the negotiating table, where both sides will need to make difficult decisions and concessions. Such a stance also overlooks the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority, in particular its sanctioning of and support for antisemitic incitement.

While criticism of Israel, like criticism of any other sovereign country in the world, can be reasonable and legitimate, the BDS campaign, which single out Israel for pariah status, is unfair and disproportionate.

For all these reasons, the Labour party has steadfastly opposed BDS. Praising the Israeli Labor party, Emily Thornberry stated at the LFI lunch at the end of last month:

Theirs is a positive vision of how a Labor-led government can build a more peaceful, more prosperous and more progressive future both for Israel and its neighbours.

A constant rejoinder to all those who somehow believe that opposition to the policies of an individual Israeli government can ever justify a hatred of the nation and its people, or a boycott of its products, its culture or its academics, or a denial of its right to defend itself from military assault and terror attacks. That sort of bigotry against the Israeli nation has never been justified and it never will be.

As a member of the Shadow Cabinet, I would ask you to clarify that you support the party's long-standing position, as outlined by the shadow foreign secretary.

A constructive and alternative approach to BDS is to promote initiatives that build bridges, promote interaction, and support peacemakers. LFI's campaign – For Israel, for Palestine, for peace – has already succeeded in persuading the government to invest £3m over the next three years to support coexistence projects in Israel and Palestine. We are continuing to work to urge the UK government to support the establishment of an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, which we are delighted that Emily has endorsed.

If useful, I would be happy to meet to discuss this letter further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joan Ryan', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rt. Hon Joan Ryan MP
Member of Parliament for Enfield North
Chair, Labour Friends of Israel