

# DATELINE

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## MIDDLE EAST

# THE PROPAGANDA WAR: BDS

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# “The Real Aim of BDS is to Bring Down The State of Israel”

Editorial | by | Matthew Kendall

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Photo: J.B. Nicholas, *New York Post*

In an effort to rid the world of antisemitism, and to enlighten willing and rational people on the new and unfortunately improved forms of antisemitism, focusing on BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) propaganda is imperative, as it is currently trending worldwide. BDS is a racist movement that aims to deprive the world— through boycotts, divestments and sanctions— of Israeli-made products and technology.

It is no surprise that this movement was founded in 2005 by a non-governmental Palestinian organization. In the Middle East, boycotting Israel is not new. Even before the state of Israel was founded in 1948, the Arab League created an economic boycott against the Jewish people.

The methods of BDS are as follows: This movement urges people to mobilize against and boycott Israeli international products made by companies, which, in the minds of the BDS supporters, profit from the violation of Palestinian rights. Additionally, the BDS movement also boycotts any Israeli sporting, cultural or academic institution that supports and **recognizes the state of Israel**.

The divestment aspect of BDS entails going after corporations that are supposedly ‘in violation’ of Palestinian rights, and the movement tries to ensure that institutions like universities’ investment portfolios and pension funds are not being used to finance the so-called ‘immoral’ corporations that support Israel.

Finally, the last element of BDS is sanctions. Sanctions against Israel are perhaps the most immoral aspect of the BDS movement due to the fact that Israel is an extremely relevant and respected actor in the international community. Since BDS supporters are ill-informed and believe that Israel’s membership in numerous significant forums, councils, and conferences is unwarranted, the movement aims to impose diplomatic and economic sanctions on the Jewish State.

In order to bring to light the current situations that the state of Israel is facing, this issue of *Dateline: Middle East* focuses on the following significant issues and events:

To begin, **Cara Lebenzon** describes an event in 2014 in Calgary during which a peaceful group of pro-Israel supporters were violently attacked by a mob of pro-Palestinian thugs, simply because they had expressed their support for the Jewish State.

**Ariel Teboul's** "Pourquoi boycotter Israël ne sert pas les palestiniens" focuses primarily on the negative affect that boycotting Israel has on Palestinians.

**Rob Coles**, the Publications Chairman for *CIJR (The Canadian Institute for Jewish Research)*, explains how student newspapers often uncritically promote BDS' anti-Israel agenda.

**Charles Bybelezer's** "Iranian Nuclear Deal: the Regional Arms Race Has Begun" underlines the most pressing issue the Middle East, and perhaps the world, currently faces: a nuclear-armed genocidal anti-Israel Islamist dictatorship.

**Bradley Martin's** "Christian Zionism at NRB" pays special attention to the NRB (National Religious Broadcasters ) international convention and the way in which it reveals pro-Israel attitudes.

Finally, **Rotem Duani** explains how the project *Trail* influences prominent people from different continents to develop a deeper knowledge of and understanding for the less conventional aspects and sites of Israel, including traits of the country that have rarely been focused on by traditional media sources.

Regardless of people's beliefs and stance towards the state of Israel, BDS is a movement that hurts not only Israel, but also the peaceful spirit and economic stability of the world.

"The real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel. That should be stated as an unambiguous goal. There should not be any equivocation on the subject. Justice and freedom for the Palestinians are incompatible with the existence of the state of Israel." -As'ad AbuKhalil

*Matthew Kendall is a Student Intern and Editor of Dateline Middle East*



## THE EXPLOITATION OF FREEDOM TO INCITE HATE

—CARA LEBENZON



Leah Hennel, *Calgary Herald*

Last summer, during the war between Israel and Hamas, as Operation Protective Edge was taking place on the other side of the world, SPHR (Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights) held an anti-Israel protest at Calgary's City Hall. Around fifteen pro-Israel protesters from the Calgary Jewish Community as well as some Christian Zionist supporters showed up to express solidarity with the victims of terror on both sides and to support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas.

The pro-Israel crowd did not instigate anyone, they did not provoke the other side by using violence or inciting hatred. They chanted pro-Israel messages of peace, and were attacked, thrown to the ground, punched in the face and brutally beat up, by a mob of angry Arab men just for being Jewish and supporting the Jewish State. Among the victims of this attack was a brave young woman named Samantha Hamilton who advocates for Israel at the University and inspires many students and young people in Calgary to stand up for Israel. She and her mother were viciously attacked, punched in the face and hit in the stomach by these raging protesters. Another young man named Jake Birrell was dragged across the street by the flag of Israel tied around his neck. Some of his friends were also jumped and punched in the face multiple times, as the perpetrators of violence yelled things like "Hitler was right."

The Calgary SPHR group which held this protest in Calgary is a small example in a myriad world of Muslim and/or left wing groups that identify as pro-Palestinian, but care more about hating Jews than the well-being of the Palestinian people. "Pro-Palestinians" do not support Hamas. In Calgary, and in Paris, and all around the world, these anti-Israel movements demonstrate that what they are really against is the freedom of speech, democracy and liberal values that Western nations cherish and protect them with. The anti-Israel community in Canada and around the world exploits the freedoms that their countries allow them by inciting a vicious hatred for the State of Israel, carefully masked by claims that they are merely criticizing Israel's policies against the Palestinians. This is achieved through lies, propaganda and even and

antisemitic blood libel, masquerading as a concern for "human rights."

How much more obvious could the crude and maliciously hateful intent of these people be than when they react to difference of opinion and peaceful dissent by using their fists?

This movement began on university campuses. The BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement and the Israel Apartheid campaign seek to brainwash young people into believing false historical accusations about Israel's role in the Middle East conflict and ignoring Palestinian terrorism. The exploitation of University multiculturalism and human rights emphasis is a microcosm of something very dangerous that is expanding into society beyond the academic platform – large "protests" that take advantage of democracy by taking to the streets to exercise anarchy, to excuse terror, to spread racist and antisemitic rhetoric.

Many of the people who flock to the streets to exercise their "right to hate," so to speak, propagate support for Hamas and Shariah Law, which are the antithesis of everything for which Western Liberalism has stood. This clash of ideologies and the exploitation of freedom in order to support terror, is the most clever, and threatening, force against our communities today. And the most frightening part of this is that these nouveaux Nazis, waving their Hamas flags and pretending to be the arbiters of human rights, are actually getting away with it.

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## POURQUOI BOYCOTTER ISRAËL NE SERT PAS LES PALESTINIENS

—ARIEL TEBOUL

En tant qu'étudiant à l'Université Concordia, à Montréal, je suis appelé à prendre position...sur plusieurs questions telles que l'austérité, l'établissement d'un service de garderie sur le campus, ou d'autres enjeux reliés à notre communauté étudiante... (Oct., 2014) : une 8ème question au référendum à été rajoutée à la dernière minute, et se lit comme suit : « Approuvez-vous que l'Association des Étudiants de Concordia (Concordia Student Union, CSU) s'associe au mouvement de Boycott, Désinvestissements et Sanctions (BDS) contre l'occupation israélienne de la Palestine jusqu'à ce que l'État d'Israël se conforme au droit international et aux principes universels des droits de l'Homme? ».

Je suis conscient que pour beaucoup d'étudiants, le conflit israélo-palestinien semble être une histoire sans fin, d'un ennui pour certain, tandis que pour l'autre le sujet ravive les tensions.



J'ai vécu deux années dans un quartier du Sud de Tel-Aviv, près de Jaffa, où Juifs et Arabes vivent côte à côte. Que ça soit à Jérusalem ou à Ramallah, j'ai rencontré chez la plupart des Israéliens et des Palestiniens des gens pragmatiques, qui se soucient plus des problèmes d'austérité ou de la hausse du coût de la vie que de politique. J'ai aussi rencontré des touristes français ou américains qui étaient capables de gâcher une soirée avec leurs argumentations sans fin sur chaque nouvelle dans les manchettes.

C'est avec deux convictions que je suis revenu au Canada : absolument tout au Moyen-Orient est « amplifié », et la plupart des gens veulent y vivre en paix. Palestiniens comme Israéliens méritent le même droit de vivre dans la dignité. Je comprends que certains, qui désirent la justice et un état viable pour les Palestiniens, soient tentés de s'associer au mouvement BDS, cependant, je vais voter NON. Pourquoi ?

- Parce que le mouvement BDS a été conçu pour servir les intérêts de groupuscules qui ont rejeté la paix. BDS refuse tout compromis et exige qu'Israël se plie à toutes ses conditions, tandis qu'il est très peu probable qu'un accord définitif se produise à moins qu'il y ait justement des compromis de la part des deux côtés.

Contrairement à ce que certains militants pro-BDS prétendent, ce mouvement appelle à un boycott de toutes les institutions académiques, culturelles et économiques israéliennes qu'elles soient localisées en Cisjordanie ou à l'intérieur des frontières d'Israël. C'est pourquoi des dirigeants tel que le président de L'Autorité Palestinienne Mahmoud Abbas, ont publiquement condamné ce mouvement, qui ne propose aucune solution, trompe le public, mais pire encore, qui profite injustement du temps, de l'argent et des ressources de ses bénévoles, activistes et donateurs.

- Ce conflit renferme des faits complexes. Quiconque prétend « détenir LA vérité sur le conflit israélo-palestinien » ne devrait pas être trop pris au sérieux. Les arguments du mouvement BDS sont souvent présentés partiellement avec des informations incomplètes. Cette tentative d'exploitation du conflit et d'imposer l'avis d'un petit groupe sur l'ensemble du corps étudiant est contraire à l'éthique, porte préjudice à plusieurs communautés sur notre campus et va à l'encontre des valeurs d'ouverture, de débat honnête et de dialogue qui ont pourtant leur place dans une université.

- La question elle-même est ambiguë\*: qu'est-ce que « occupation de la Palestine » signifie exactement ? Parle-t-on des frontières de 1967 ? D'avant 1948 ? S'agit-il d'une solution à deux États ou de remplacer totalement Israël ? Ce manque de clarté n'est pas « involontaire ». Omar Barghouti, figure prépondérante et fondateur du mouvement BDS, est controversé pour son refus de reconnaître le droit de l'État d'Israël d'exister. Même Norman Finkelstein (conférencier célèbre pour ses propos hostiles envers Israël et ses dirigeants) condamne

l'hypocrisie du mouvement BDS, qu'il qualifie de « secte ». Quelle crédibilité peut-on accorder à un mouvement qui ne respecte pas le droit international ?

(\* La question utilisée jusqu'au 25 novembre, avant que le conseil judiciaire du CSU décide de la faire modifier vers une version plus neutre, malgré les torts causés pendant deux semaines de campagne).

- Le mouvement BDS boycotte les membres des institutions académiques et culturelles israéliennes qui sont pourtant les plus critiques envers le gouvernement israélien et parmi les premiers défenseurs des droits des Palestiniens. L'exclusion du dialogue ne fait aucun sens. De plus, Israël a tellement contribué dans les domaines de la santé, des technologies et des sciences que vivre dans une société sans « Made in Israel » serait presque impossible et un recul en arrière.

- Le mouvement BDS est sectaire, déshumanise les Israéliens, et ne propose pas d'ouverture envers les autres. Cela rajoute des dommages à des relations israélo-palestiniennes déjà fragiles. Certes, le problème du conflit doit être adressé, mais de façon responsable, juste et équilibrée. Le silence relatif de ce mouvement sur des conflits bien plus meurtriers tel qu'actuellement en Syrie ou en Irak ne fait qu'aggraver cette situation.

Cette instrumentalisation du conflit pousse les uns et les autres vers le repli communautaire, tandis que nous assistons à une montée des extrémismes, de droite comme de gauche, dans les sociétés israélienne et palestinienne. Alors qu'un risque de troisième Intifada, lourde de conséquences, est réel, ça n'est pas de plus de préjugés que nous avons besoin, mais davantage d'ouverture et de dialogue.

À l'Université Concordia, nous avons le potentiel d'un impact positif. Parce que finalement, Israël et la Palestine doivent faire partie de la solution, nous nous devons de dire NON au boycott BDS et OUI à la diversité et l'inclusion; non seulement de nos communautés palestinienne et les israéliennes, mais pour tous ceux de notre campus qui partagent des origines ou des intérêts avec le Moyen-Orient.

Nous avons tellement à apprendre des uns et des autres. Au-delà de la politique, nous pouvons inclure aussi les arts et la culture. Je fais donc appel à tous ceux qui partagent ces valeurs que sont l'acceptation d'autrui, le dialogue et l'ouverture vers un multiculturalisme qui n'exclut personne, de se joindre à moi pour ce projet unique.

Ensemble, innovons et soyons de vrais ambassadeurs de la paix. Et comme Amin Maalouf le dit si bien, « c'est notre regard qui enferme souvent les autres dans leurs plus étroites appartenances, et c'est notre regard aussi qui peut les libérer. »

*(Times of Israel, Nov. 27, 2014)*

# MEDIA DISTORTIONS: STUDENT NEWSPAPER PROMOTES ANTI-ISRAEL BDS AGENDA

— ROB COLES

North American universities are ground-zero for the BDS movement and other anti-Israel activism. Students, often uninformed about the Arab-Israeli conflict, are easily influenced by BDS' false accusations of "Israeli apartheid" and human rights abuses.

BDS deceives students by claiming to be a grass-roots protest movement that peacefully demands Israel accede to a so-called two-state solution along "1967 lines." This is a misrepresentation. BDS groups not only use hateful, antisemitic language, but are also connected to radical Islamists and Palestinian terrorist organizations such as Hamas. Unfortunately, student newspapers uncritically

promote the BDS agenda by circulating biased articles presenting unquestioned BDS propaganda.

A recent article in Concordia University's *The Link* illustrates this point. "Protests No Longer Postpone Marc Garneau's Talk" by Jonathan Cook, a regular contributor to *The Link* on Israel-Palestinian issues, deceptively promotes the BDS' narrative through false accusations of racism. Cook's piece referred to an event scheduled for January 12 at the *Canadian Institute for Jewish Research (CIJR)* with Liberal MP Marc Garneau, co-sponsored by *CAMERA (the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America)*. Garneau's talk was re-scheduled for March 20.



A few hours before the January 12 event, Montreal Police advised *CIJR* of a potentially violent protest reportedly to take place outside Garneau's talk. Although *CIJR* was reluctant to delay the event, the decision to postpone was made because of police concern coming less than one week after the murderous *Charlie Hebdo* and *Hyper Casber* attacks by Islamist terrorists in Paris. As a Jewish organization, *CIJR* did not want to risk the safety of attendees amid growing antisemitic incidents in the West, particularly after the murders of four Jews in Paris the week before the event.

*CIJR* issued a press release advising of the postponement, noting that "*CIJR*...wishes clearly to state that it will not be intimidated by the kind of violent and threatening tactics used on, and off, campus by pro-Palestinian and pro-"BDS" groups...". The BDS Committee at Concordia and Students for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) responded with its own statement about the press release, claiming they "strongly" condemn the "false and racist" allegations posed against them by *CAMERA* and *CIJR*:

"Ethnically linking the deaths of *Charlie Hebdo* writers by non-BDS movement groups to their own groups at Concordia is bluntly racist and unfounded," they

proclaimed. Cook added that Concordia "students voted to have the CSU endorse the BDS movement in a referendum this semester." Cook, of course, didn't mention that academic boycotts, according to Concordia University President Alan Shepard, "foreclose all opportunities for...a free exchange of ideas and perspectives." Nor did Cook mention BDS' links with Palestinian terrorist organizations.

*CIJR's* statement singled-out pro-Palestinian and BDS groups because their anti-Zionist rhetoric provides justification, and often leads to, violent retribution against Jews. Anti-Israel demonstrations during Israel's defensive war against Hamas' rocket attacks last summer, for example, contributed to a wave of antisemitic incidents in Europe and North America, culminating in terrorist attacks against Jews in Paris and Copenhagen. A recent pro-Palestinian demonstration in Calgary also turned violent when a group of pro-Israeli counter-demonstrators were attacked by Islamist thugs (see Cara Lebenzon's article: "The Exploitation of Freedom to Incite Hate," also in this issue). University students aren't exposed to the whole story when student-media, such as *The Link*, fail to explain the connections between BDS, antisemitic violence and terrorism.

# IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEAL? THE REGIONAL ARMS RACE HAS BEGUN

—CHARLES BYBELEZER

One of the primary concerns voiced over the deal-in-the-making with Iran has long been that leaving the Islamic Republic with its atomic infrastructure intact – thereby solidifying its nuclear threshold status – would trigger a dangerous arms race in the world's most volatile region. To the detriment of global security, this warning, which was not heeded, is now materializing.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia and South Korea announced a multi-billion-dollar deal that will see two power plants built in the kingdom over the next two decades. Overall, Saudi Arabia has plans to build as many as 16 reactors by 2032. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the agreement “rais[ed] concerns on Capitol Hill and among US allies that a deal with Iran, rather than stanching the spread of nuclear technologies, risks fueling it.”

In fact, Riyadh has warned that it will seek to match the nuclear capabilities Iran is allowed to maintain as part of any final agreement reached with world powers. Speaking to the *BBC* last week, Saudi prince Turki al-Faisal, a senior member of the royal family and former intelligence chief, was explicit: “I’ve always said whatever comes out of these talks, we will want the same. So if Iran has the ability to enrich uranium to whatever level, it’s not just Saudi Arabia that’s going to ask for that. The whole world will be an open door to go that route without any inhibition.” Specifically, the *Wall Street Journal* cited Saudi Arabia’s military alliance with Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with a history of proliferation. Previous reports have alleged that Riyadh already has paid-for nukes stationed in Islamabad.

As regards conventional weapons, the release of the annual Global Defense Trade Report shows that the Saudis have become the world’s largest arms importer; overtaking India with more than \$6.4 billion spent in 2014, an increase of 54 percent over the previous year. The study forecasted a further increase of 52% in 2015, to \$9.8b. A co-author of the report cited “an escalation of regional tensions in the Middle East” as one of the reasons for the military build-up.

News out of Saudi Arabia was preceded in February by the announcement that Cairo and Moscow had signed a preliminary deal that would see Russia, in President Vladimir Putin’s words, build “a whole new nuclear power industry” in Egypt. President Abdel Fattah Sisi confirmed the signing of “a memorandum of understanding to build [a] first nuclear plant in El-Dabaa,” with Russia providing staff and scientific research. Egypt’s re-entry into Russia’s orbit follows the breakdown in relations with the US due to the Obama administration’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood, now designated by Cairo as a terrorist organization. An impotent White House said it would not oppose the nuclear deal with Moscow so long as Cairo meets its “obligations.”

For its part, Egypt too has been spending freely to

upgrade its military; this, despite Sisi admitting earlier this month at a summit that the country needs some \$200b. to keep the economy afloat. Nevertheless, Cairo formalized in February an arms deal with Russia worth at least \$2b., and also minted a major agreement to purchase 24 French-made Rafale fighter jets.

The regional trend applies to Jordan as well, which in December signed an accord which will see Russia build Amman its first nuclear power plant, expected to be operational by 2024. For their part, both the United Arab Emirates and Turkey are ahead of the curve. The UAE has a \$20b. contract with a South Korean consortium to build four nuclear reactors by 2020 at Barakah, two of which are already in construction. Ankara, meanwhile, is set to begin building – in conjunction with Russian company Rosatom – its first nuclear plant in Akkuyu as early as this summer. Turkey has plans to complete three such facilities by 2023.

According to the World Nuclear Association, Qatar, Kuwait, Yemen, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Sudan are all, to various degrees, pursuing nuclear energy programs. It is no coincidence that all of the countries mentioned are majority Sunni; threatened by the prospect of Shi’ite Iran obtaining the bomb, they have launched their own atomic programs as a counter-measure.

Much of this traces back to US President Barack Obama’s appeasement of the mullahs and his acceptance of their ongoing nuclear transgressions. Through his effective legitimization of Iran as a nuclear threshold state, Obama has made a mockery of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as well as more than a half-dozen legally binding United Nations resolutions which prevent the Islamic Republic from enriching uranium, among numerous other illicit atomic activities.

It is painfully ironic that Obama burst onto the scene promising to reduce existing nuclear arsenals and to curb the spread of weapons of mass destruction, a major impetus for his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In fact, only three months after assuming the presidency, Obama began work on the New START treaty as part of his now failed “reset” in relations with Russia. Signed in April 2010 and ratified a year later, the bilateral accord was crafted with a view to reducing the former Cold War protagonists’ strategic nuclear stockpiles.

A handful of years later, Moscow is sharing nuclear technology throughout the Middle East, including in Iran, where the Bushehr nuclear reactor is already online. Clearly, Obama’s actions have had the exact opposite of their intended effect: His courtship of Tehran and general geopolitical naiveté have set in motion an arms race that is gaining steam; one which will inevitably have dire consequences for the world as a whole.

*(Charles Bybelezer is a former CIJR Publications Manager, Jerusalem Post, Mar. 24, 2015)*

# CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AT NRB

—BRADLEY MARTIN

“For if you persist in keeping silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from some other place. While you and your father’s house will perish” proclaimed the founder and president of *Proclaiming Justice to the Nations (PJTN)* Laurie Cardoza-Moore. She drew a parallel to the *Book of Esther* and the contemporary relationship between the United States and Israel. Zionism is expressed through Biblical language and passionate Evangelical affinity for the Jewish people, at the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) International Christian Media Convention in Nashville, Tennessee.



NRB is an international network of evangelical Christian communicators. They annually hold a media convention at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, where thousands of attendees engage in networking. 200 vendors and ministries showcase their products and services on 130,000 square feet of exhibit space. The convention itself is a prestigious event with prominent figures in attendance such as actor Chuck Norris, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Mark Burnett, producer of hit reality TV shows such as *Survivor*.

While primarily religious in nature, seeking to strengthen conservative Christian policies in the United States such as school prayer, communicating their brand of Christianity to others, and advocacy for traditional marriage, NRB’s support for Israel features itself with an outstanding fervor.

When entering the exhibit hall, this is immediately noticeable. There were several booths which sold Hannukah menorahs and other Judaica items with a Christian flavor such as *tallitot* displaying crosses and Jesus’ name in Hebrew characters. There were tapestries with the Lord’s Prayer, written in Hebrew alongside Stars of David. Miniature models of the Ark of the Covenant were given for free to attendees by one vendor.

There were also *shofarot* and *mezuzah* cases alongside various Christian crosses. One particular striking image was that of a Jesus statue standing on top of a Star of David. There were also fiction and non-fiction books on the State of Israel, alongside Christian conservative-themed self-help books that range in instruction from how to effectively spread the Christian faith to what to do if a loved one comes out as a homosexual.

There is also an abundance of Israeli flags and Jewish symbols to be found in the non-vendor pavilions as well. High Adventure Ministries, a Messianic ministry based in Jerusalem, displays its logo with the Star of David and seeks to proselytize listeners to Christianity throughout the world and to rally support behind Israel. Other organizations that are set up include Christian Friends of Yad Vashem, which promotes Christian tours as well as providing financial help to the institute. There is Heart to Heart, which gives Christians the opportunity to tour Israel with Magen David Adom and provide support especially in the form of blood donations and sponsorship of ambulances.

Then there is PJTN, who are “Christians educating and calling this generation to protect and defend God’s Chosen People and the land of Israel.”



Israel’s government certainly understands the value of such Christian Zionist support, which is why Israel’s Ministry of Tourism set up a pavilion estimated to cost one-hundred thousand USD in a central location to promote a number of trips to the country. Israeli Minister of Tourism Uzi Landau, also spoke to attendees at an event sponsored by PJTN. In his speech, he outlined the common values between Christians and Jews as well as the need to unite against the barbarism of radical Islamic elements such as ISIS.

The NRB international convention—in contradiction to the BDS propagandists—exhibits quite a remarkable and extraordinary concentration of pro-Israel sentiment, based on the theological view that blessing the Jews and the State of Israel will result in blessings from God. There is an affirmation and desire to explore the Judaic roots of Christianity, making these Christians strong advocates for Israel and exemplary allies.



# TraIL

— ROTEM DUANI

After a major decline in tourism following last year's "Operation Protective Edge," the fight to recover Israeli tourism has just begun. *TraIL* is a unique project with the goal of encouraging influential people from Europe, North and South America to see the beautiful, diverse and less familiar sides of Israel not exposed in the foreign media. *TraIL* encourages positive advertising of Israel through the perspective of the Israeli National Trail - a beautiful hike with great potential to be a main destination in international tourism.

In September, 2014, an international and professional delegation of travel bloggers, photographers and reporters arrived to participate in the *TraIL* project — a volunteer initiative of a group of students from Ben Gurion University in Beersheba. The participants landed at Ben Gurion Airport on Sunday the 7th of September and began the eight-day, breathtaking journey along the Israeli National Trail (INT). The week was carefully planned to visit the trail's highlights. The first night was spent in Tel Aviv enjoying the wild night life of the city. From there visitors went to the south to hike and sleep in the endless desert and explore the small Makhtesh and Sde Boker areas. The group then took a detour to the capital, the holy city of Jerusalem, and eventually arrived to the green environment of the north. The whole journey took place in the foot steps of the INT, as tourists become connected not only with nature, but also with the incredible multi-culturalism that our little country has to offer. They met with trail "angels," the Druze in the north and Bedouin in the south.

The eight delegation members are all professionals who know the hiking industry through both photography and journalism. Daniella, a German hiking blogger, said prior to her arrival "I think this is a once in a lifetime

opportunity, I get to see Israel as a place with great cultural meaning, I'm anxious to experience the multiculturalism combined with some serious hiking." She also added "I have visited about forty countries and haven't had the chance to come to Israel.

The thought of recommending to my readers about a destination that integrates history, scenery and culture is very exciting to me." After the journey the travel journalists will share their experience with thousands of followers around the world, introducing a different perspective of Israel and its people.

The idea began when 21 students from Ben Gurion University were asked to think of an idea for a unique project that would promote Israel in a non-political way. The group is taking part in a program for public diplomacy and leadership of StandWithUs, which is active in seven different universities in Israel.

The group fundraised in original and unique ways, and created collaboration with the office of tourism and the student body of Ben Gurion University. The group chose a few participants from hundreds of applicants and created a diverse and professional delegation for a meaningful *TraIL* journey.



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