Besiege your siege with madness
All for whom you care are gone
... gone
So for you, it is either to be
Or not to be

—Mahmoud Darwish, In Praise of the Lofty Shadow, 1983

When the powerful turn their backs to justice, when they channel their solidarity to the oppressor, it becomes the task of the powerless to band together and fight for what is right. This is a general principle of solidarity against oppression, one that the world has witnessed in action time and time again, from the civil war in Spain, through occupied Vietnam and Algeria, to apartheid South Africa. Such solidarity is not new in the case of Palestine. For over 60 years, activists around the world have worked to put an end to the Zionist injustices against the Palestinian people. We have witnessed an important shift, however, in the forms that this solidarity has taken. Solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle since 2005 has largely taken the form of a global campaign to isolate the Israeli regime on every level, under the banner of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), until Israel complies with international law.1

This chapter examines how people and institutions around the world have acted in solidarity with the Palestinian cause over the years, and the
ways solidarity activity has changed since the Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS in July 2005. It concludes with some general remarks on the trajectory of the BDS movement both inside and outside of Palestine, its relationship to the Palestinian national movement, and an assessment of the challenges faced by the movement.

On the Eve of the BDS Call

Solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for return, self-determination, and equality has taken many forms over the decades. During the 1948 Nakba, while Zionist forces systematically displaced the majority of the Palestinian population from their homeland, international volunteers came to Palestine from Arab and Muslim countries, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere to fight as military irregulars in the defense of Palestine. In the decades that followed, member states of the Arab League, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference imposed sanctions on the new state of Israel, refusing to recognize the Zionist state and combating any normalization with its institutions. As the Palestinian liberation movement began to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, volunteers from different parts of the world, particularly the Global South, joined the armed struggle as both trainers and trainees who took part in the military and political apparatuses of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its member factions. Various states offered support through diplomatic, financial, logistical, and military means as well as university scholarships to Palestinian students. However, despite these demonstrations of support from countries in the Global South, Zionism remained largely unchallenged in the countries of the Global North, even by Northern leftist movements, and space for criticism of Israel only began to open with Israel’s invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 as images and reports of the devastating siege of Beirut and the Sabra and Shatila massacres were broadcast to Western publics. Israel’s democratic image was further eroded by the broadcasting of the brutal measures it used to quash the 1987 Palestinian intifada, revealing the massive power imbalance embodied by the confrontation between one of the world’s most powerful armies and the Palestinian children armed with little more than the stones from the rubble of their demolished homes.

The organizing principle of the decades of Palestinian resistance dominated by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from the 1960s through the 1980s was armed struggle, and international solidarity principally referred to solidarity with the armed struggle. After the signing of the Oslo Agreements, and the advent of the “peace process” between Israel