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Al-Awda, The Palestine Right to Return Coalition Background and Ideology

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Al-Awda was established in April 2000 in response to the ongoing peace negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. The group, founded by a group of attendees of a Trans-Arab Research Institute (TARI) conference in Boston, was initially created to advocate for the "right" of Palestinian refugees to return "to their homes and lands of origin" that existed prior to the founding of Israel.

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Al-Awda was first established as an online listserv to facilitate communication between like-minded activists and subsequently grew into an active international organization. Since its founding, Al-Awda's reach around the country has significantly expanded and there are now approximately 15 Al-Awda regional chapters, many of which maintain separate listserves.

Al-Awda supports the establishment of a Palestinian state over all the territory west of the Jordan River, including Israel. On its Web site, Al-Awda explicitly states that all "Palestinian Arab people...are indigenous to Palestine" and "are entitled to live anywhere in Palestine which encompasses present-day 'Israel,' the West Bank and Gaza Strip." Its unwillingness to accept Israel's existence is exemplified by a slogan "Palestine Will Be Free from the River to the Sea," which is frequently chanted at Al-Awda events and is featured on t-shirts sold by the group.

Al-Awda considers its advocacy on behalf of Palestinians as being at the center of a global revolutionary struggle against Zionism, which it views as inherently racist. According to Al-Awda's Points of Unity, "the 'Israeli' definition of Jewish nationals [is] part of the racism and discrimination inherent in Zionist ideology which underlies the policies and laws of the settler state of 'Israel.'"

In its early years, Al-Awda focused its activism on ways to punitively punish Israel through several boycott and [divestment campaigns](#), including Boycott Israeli Goods (BIG); boycott campaigns against Caterpillar, which supplies machinery to the Israeli military used in the Palestinian territories and the Palestine Solidarity Movement (PSM), an umbrella organization of anti-Israel groups that was active in the early 2000s and promoted divestment from Israel. (The [PSM's fourth annual conference](#), held at Duke University in

October 2004, was organized in part by Al-Awda Wisconsin representative Fayyad Sbaihat, who was also one of the conference's national



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contacts.) While these boycott initiatives have not been very successful, Al-Awda has not ceased to consistently support new boycott campaigns and discuss possible BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) initiatives at its conventions and events.

When organizing anti-Israel initiatives and events, Al-Awda regularly forms coalitions with other groups and has a particularly strong alliance with the [International Action Center](#) (IAC) and the [ANSWER Coalition](#).



Advocating for the destruction of Israel at a New York City rally co-organized by Al-Awda, July 28, 2006.

Al-Awda is also active outside the U.S., and has chapters in Canada, the United Kingdom and elsewhere, according to its Web site. In addition, Al-Awda is a member of the Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition, which includes right of return organizations based in the Middle East and Europe.

Al-Awda is based in Carlsbad, California, and is a registered 501(c)3 organization. According to its 990 tax filings for 2007, Al-Awda contributes most of its revenue to "emergency relief" to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and for events to educate the public about "refugee rights."

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