



### What is Indigo Books & Music Inc.?

Founded in 1996, Indigo Books & Music Inc., is the largest Canadian book retail chain. Heather Reisman is founder and CEO of the company, while her husband Gerry Schwartz is the founder and former president of Onex Inc., and a member of the board of directors at Indigo. Between them, they control over 60% of the shares of the company.

### Why boycott Indigo Books & Music Inc.?

In 2005, Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz established the *HESEG Foundation for Lone Soldiers*, which encourages foreigners to join the Israeli army and continue their studies in Israel. Since any purchase at Indigo generates income for Heather and Schwartz, shopping at Indigo indirectly supports Israel's military activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Due to the links to the HESEG Foundation, the Palestinian solidarity movement in Canada has been encouraging a boycott of Indigo for many years. In 2006 and 2007, the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid and other groups led many boycotts, pickets, and vigils in front of Indigo stores in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and across the country.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, professors at Mt. Allison University protested the awarding of an honorary degree to Reisman due to her support for HESEG.<sup>2</sup> In 2023, an Indigo store in Toronto was splattered with red paint and posters accusing Reisman of funding genocide in Gaza.<sup>3</sup>

The boycott is also a response to the call from Palestinian civil society, who in 2005 asked the international community to use non-violent forms of economic pressure to force Israel to comply with international law. This strategy includes the use of boycotts against companies that are complicit in the oppression of Palestinians.<sup>4</sup>

### How does the HESEG Foundation for Lone Soldiers support the Israeli military?

The HESEG Foundation for Lone Soldiers encourages foreigners to join the Israeli military, an occupying power which oppresses the Palestinian people and commits systemic violations of human rights and international law.

Each year, the HESEG foundation rewards hundreds of "Lone Soldiers" with scholarships and living expenses to allow them to continue their academic studies in Israel. Over the last two years, the annual amount spent on

scholarships and grants was between \$5.5M and \$6.5M.<sup>5</sup> According to HESEG's website, these programs are intended to help discharged lone soldiers "remain in Israel, acquire an academic education, continue to strive for excellence, and lead the State of Israel to future achievements."<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Israeli citizens, the "Lone Soldiers" are under no civil obligation to participate in the Israeli army. On the contrary, they volunteer to participate in Israel's occupation forces. While HESEG may not be directly involved in recruiting for the Israeli army, it provides a financial incentive for foreigners to enlist as lone soldiers by offering support when they complete their military service. This support was identified as a need because lone soldiers lack "the kind of support networks most domestic IDF [Israeli Defence Forces] soldiers have to make their stints of army duty easier."<sup>7</sup> HESEG's scholarships are listed on the "Draft IDF" website as a resource for those thinking about enlisting.<sup>8</sup> As Naomi Klein has put it, HESEG's scholarships "are an important part of Israel's ability to recruit soldiers from overseas."<sup>9</sup>

Further, by rewarding service in Israel's military, HESEG is promoting the participation of its beneficiaries in war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories. Like Israeli other soldiers, "Lone Soldiers" may participate in military offensives against Gaza, operate checkpoints in the West Bank, or otherwise participate in the day-to-day enforcement of military occupation. The HESEG Foundation thus encourages individuals to participate in activities which are illegal under the *Fourth Geneva Convention*, the *Hague Convention* and several other related instruments of international law (e.g. *The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, etc.).

### Are there other ties between the HESEG Foundation and the Israeli military?

As a foundation established to support former soldiers, there have always been close connections between HESEG and the Israeli military. HESEG was unveiled in a ceremony on the Sde Dov air force base in Tel Aviv, with the participation of Israeli defence minister Shaul Mofaz.<sup>10</sup> As Mofaz lauded Reisman and Schwartz: "Your contribution through this foundation continues your long-standing tradition of support for the IDF [Israeli Defence Forces]."<sup>11</sup>

The HESEG Board of Directors has always been composed of many senior members or veterans of the Israeli army, some of which have been criticized for major violations of international law under their command. One such former board member was Doron Almog, who escaped arrest in London in 2005 on charges of war crimes related to the bulldozing of homes in Gaza while he was commander.<sup>12</sup> A current board member is Eliezer Shkedi, who served as Commander of the Israeli Air Force from 2004-2008, a period that included Israel's war on Lebanon in which indiscriminate airstrikes killed 900 civilians.<sup>13</sup> HESEG is therefore directly linked to the Israeli army, and works jointly with key personnel.

During a ceremony in 2006, the Israeli military gifted Reisman and Schwartz with the firearm of an American

"Lone Soldier" who was killed in action, as a sign of gratitude for their support.<sup>14</sup>

### **When will the boycott strategy end?**

The boycott strategy will end if one or more of the following take place:

- Israel complies with international law and ends its practices of occupation, apartheid, and dispossession of the Palestinian people;
- Reisman and Schwartz withdraw from the Foundation, or the HESEG Foundation changes its mandate and stops supporting Israeli soldiers;
- Reisman and Schwartz sell their shares in Indigo Books and Music Inc.

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<sup>1</sup> *Washington Jewish Week*, "Jewish World," January 4, 2007; *Canadian Jewish News*, "Palestinian activists to boycott Chapters/Indigo," June 7, 2007; *Canadian Jewish News*, "Mulroney heckled," Sept 26, 2007; *Canadian Jewish News*, "Chapters Boycotted," December 20, 2007; BDS Movement, "US: Campaigners confront bookseller's apartheid links," November 2, 2007, Website accessed December 7, 2023, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/us-campaigners-confront-booksellers-apartheid-links>; Now Toronto, "Indigo's Israel Problem," June 7, 2010; Sue Ferguson, "Tear Down That Wall!" *This Magazine*, Sept/Oct 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Telegraph-Journal*, "Indigo Books founder receives degree despite opposition," May 18, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> *Toronto Star*, "11 protesters charged with mischief after Toronto Indigo vandalized," November 23, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> BDS Movement, "Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS," July 9, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> *The Breach*, "In stunning pre-dawn raids, Toronto police 'terrorize' Palestine activists," November 24, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> HESEG Foundation for Lone Soldiers, "The Founders," Website accessed December 7, 2023, <https://www.heseg.com/>

<sup>7</sup> *Canadian Jewish News*, "Canadians aid lone soldiers," December 15, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Draft IDF, "Post Army," Website accessed December 7, 2023, <https://draftidf.co.il/post-army/>

<sup>9</sup> Naomi Klein, "Naomi Klein to Heather Reisman: Charges must be dropped against Indigo 11," *The Breach*, November 30, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, "New fund for lone soldiers launched," May 4, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> *Canadian Jewish News*, "Canadians aid lone soldiers," December 15, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> *The Independent*, "Keeping the peace? The El Al flight and the Israeli army officer," February 20, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Israel/Lebanon: Israeli Indiscriminate Attacks Killed Most Civilians," September 5, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, "Fallen lone soldier remembered at Heseg Fund ceremony," November 22, 2006.