

BRICUP NEWSLETTER

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The PACBI Column

Sixty Years of Dispossession and Ethnic Cleansing

To mark the 60th anniversary of the Nakba, PACBI and other Palestinian civil society organizations have launched a campaign to boycott the "Israel at 60" celebrations.

The "Israel at 60" festivities are spearheaded by Shimon Peres, the current president of Israel, who has invited scores of politicians, writers, artists and other celebrities to join him in Israel in May. Among those invited are Nicholas Sarkozy, Tony Blair, the entire German Cabinet, Madonna, Bono of U-2, and the remaining members of the Beatles, to name only a few. Other celebrations are planned in the USA and Europe.

The PACBI-initiated appeal urges international civil society in all its components, particularly institutions and individuals working in the arts, academia, sport, trade unions, and communities of faith to boycott the "Israel at 60" celebrations wherever they are held in the world. These celebrations, by definition, insult our history, violate our rights, and deepen our oppression. They also render the path to justice, freedom, equality, and sustainable peace based on international law longer than ever before. With the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, Palestine disappeared from the map of the world. Around 700,000-800,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homeland. Today they and three generations of their offspring continue to live as refugees in exile. Over 400 villages were destroyed in an attempt to rewrite history, while Palestinian homes in cities such as Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem were used to house newly-arrived Jewish immigrants. The names of neighbourhoods and streets were changed to erase any trace of Palestinian existence. Tens of thousands of other Palestinians were internally displaced, prevented from returning to their villages even though they had not left the country. Israel's relentless ethnic cleansing, racism, and colonial rule continue today.

Boycott the "Israel at 60" Celebrations!

Open letters of protest from BRICUP

To Paul, Ringo and the families of John and George

Dear all,

We are writing to you to ask you to decline the invitation to join the celebrations marking the birth of the state of Israel in 1948.

What happened was not the peaceful creation of a safe haven for Jews escaping from Europe; it was the brutal ethnic cleansing and massacre of the Palestinians and the theft of their land. The United Nations decision in 1947 to partition Palestine allocated 55% of the Palestinian land for a Jewish state and 45 % for a Palestinian state. But even that gross settlement was not good enough for the Zionists who had targeted the whole of Palestine for the creation of a Jewish State - long before the Nazi atrocities. So, the Zionists took 78% of the land, brutally exiled or killed over 750,000 Arab Palestinians and destroyed over 400 of their villages in an ethnic cleansing operation that was driven by brutal terrorism.

Palestine/Israel is about the size of Wales. Can you imagine what the Welsh would have felt and done if the UN had decided to partition Wales and incomers had ethnically cleansed and massacred Welsh villages? It is not only the Palestinians who remember these days of horror as the Nakba; Israeli historians themselves have documented these events in all their bloody detail. And little has changed since in 1967 Israel seized the remaining Palestinian territory (the West Bank and Gaza) and the brutal occupation continues.

The Beatles sang "All you need is love" but Israel believes that all it needs is racism and an army. Is this a policy that would have commanded their support when they were singing together? We don't think so. The prospect of the surviving Beatles celebrating the Zionist theft of Palestinian land in 1948 is obscene, both for the suffering Palestinian people and for the growing number of British people who support their call for justice. As John put it, it is time to give peace a chance, not to celebrate oppression.

Signed by:
British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP)
Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC)
British Muslim Initiative (BMI)
Friends of Al-Aqsa UK
Ahdaf Soueif, Acclaimed Author
BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
Ittijah - Union of Arab Community Based Associations
The Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign
Alternative Information Center Palestine/Israel
Comité de Soutien au Peuple Palestinien - Belgique
Association Belgo-Palestinienne - Belgique
Comité pour une Paix Juste au Proche Orient - Luxembourg
Aktionsbuendnis fuer einen gerechten Frieden in Palaestina, Germany
Women in Solidarity with Palestine, Toronto
New York City Labor Against the War – USA

Dear Marianne Faithfull,

We are interested to see that you are giving a concert in Israel on International Women's Day. We are musicians who have made the decision not to perform in Israel while it occupies Palestinian lands and denies Palestinians their human rights and their national aspirations. Israel's occupation, as you know, has endured now for over 40 years, growing more repressive by the year. It is an occupation that gobbles up Palestinian land to build illegal settlements and settlers-only roads. It is an occupation that steals water - 80% of the West Bank's water is taken by Israel so that the settlers on their hilltops can water their lawns and fill their swimming pools while in the villages below Palestinians have no running water. It is an occupation that kills, tortures, humiliates, imprisons men, women and children without charge or trial, bulldozes houses, herds Palestinians into walled ghettos and, through checkpoints, roadblocks, the Separation Barrier and an apartheid-like pass system, prevents Palestinians from going to work, children from going to school, farmers from harvesting their crops, pregnant women and the critically ill from reaching hospital. Of course, no Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza will be allowed to attend your concert.

While you are in Israel, we hope you will find time to visit the West Bank - Bethlehem, perhaps, where you will see how the Wall is strangling the life out of the

city. Or Hebron, where 400 fanatical settlers are given free rein to terrorise the 160, 000 Palestinian population, attacking and beating them, destroying their property, poisoning their sheep. *This is occupation.*

It is an easy trip to go to Ma'ale Adumim, the large illegal settlement to the east of Jerusalem which effectively cuts the West Bank in two. There in the main street you will see a row of ancient olive trees, every one of them uprooted from Palestinian farmland. Over 800,000 olive trees have been destroyed or stolen by the Israeli army and the settlers. *This is occupation.*

You will not, of course, be able to visit Gaza which Israel is currently blockading, a collective punishment that deprives a million and a half Palestinians of essential food, medicines, power and clean water. *This, too, is occupation.*

In this context, we hope that you will find an opportunity during your concert to express solidarity with Palestinians under siege and under occupation. In this way, you would also be expressing solidarity with those Israeli groups - like Gush Shalom, B'tselem (the Israeli Human Rights Organisation), Rabbis for Human Rights, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Bat Shalom, Anarchists Against the Wall, Ta'ayush, the refuseniks and the shministim - which have an honorable record in opposing their government's human rights abuses and violations of international law and UN resolutions.

Best Wishes,

Anthony Burns-Cox (organist & choirmaster)
Debra Fink (singer)
Reem Kelani (singer)
Les Levidow (rebetiko violinist)
Leon Rosselson (songwriter)
Camilla Saunders (pianist & composer)
Patrick Simons (composer)
Debra Skeen (singer)
Michael Szpakowski (composer)
David Ward (composer)
Dr. Ahmet Yurur (composer & musicologist)

Israeli Higher Education establishments in the Occupied Territories.

Many people know about Ariel College (Ariel University Center of Samaria – formerly the College of Judea and Samaria) set up in the illegal

Ariel settlement by Bar Ilan University under the auspices of the Israeli Defence Ministry. Not so widely known are the other four establishments. There are one university college - Yehuda Regional College in Kiryat Arba - and three teacher training colleges: Herzog Teacher's College at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shvut; Ohalo College of Education in Katzrin; and Orot College for Women in Elkana. These colleges are all in breach of international law and we ask all supporters to be alert for any links at institutional or individual academic level. If you discover any links we ask you to let BRICUP know as well as contesting them locally.

Ariel is organizing and hosting the Fifth International Conference on Mathematical Modeling and Computer Simulations of Materials Technologies (MMT-2008) in September 2008. The organizing committee has three Russian academics amongst its members and there is an international advisory committee with members from Canada, China, Germany, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Ukraine and the USA. The conference, although being held in the illegal Ariel settlement, announces itself to be "located in the heart of Israel". Please send any information on this conference to BRICUP.

From time to time we hope to be able to print personal stories of academic life under the Israeli occupation. This is the first – by Dr. Carmela Armanios Omary, Mathematics Department, Birzeit University.

Never Leave Home Without a Tissue

In March 2002 Israeli Military forces bulldozed deep trenches in the newly-paved road connecting the cities of Ramallah and Birzeit in the West Bank. For more than three years, faculty and students at Birzeit University were not able to drive to the University. We were forced to take taxis from Ramallah to one end of the trench, walk about one kilometre to the second end, and catch another taxi to the University.

About 35 villages use this road to get to Ramallah for work and shopping, as well as for seeking medical and educational services. Young children had to carry their heavy school bags while walking the one kilometre stretch over dirt mounds and rubble, battling heavy

rain or the hot sun. The elderly and handicapped suffered the most. One day while walking home, we saw four young men carrying an elderly woman on a stretcher from an ambulance at one end of the checkpoint to the other end, where another ambulance was awaiting.

The Israeli authorities claimed that the checkpoint was necessary for "security reasons"! I wondered how it was that driving my car from the Palestinian city of Ramallah to the Palestinian University of Birzeit could pose a security threat to the mighty state of Israel!

We were all persistent in carrying on with our daily lives, despite the Israeli actions. One memorable scene was of two young people carrying a three-layer wedding cake. They walked slowly, carefully balancing the cake so that it would not fall. Passers-by greeted them and congratulated them on their upcoming happy occasion. Despite the miserable situation, this sight filled my heart with hope. I could imagine that these two young men were the brothers of a young man or woman who would be getting married that day. They were so determined to celebrate their brother's or sister's special day in spite of the Israeli occupation, that they were willing to traverse this horrid dirt road and checkpoint carrying a fancy wedding cake from Ramallah.

On the morning of May 23, 2003, as I took my long walk across the checkpoint, carrying my briefcase and lunch box, I began to plan my day. As the Vice President for Administrative and Financial Affairs at Birzeit, I was particularly concerned about the new financial computer program that the University was beginning to implement. I had scheduled meetings with the Finance Office and the Computer Department and I was concerned because we were slightly behind schedule. I did not realize that I would have many more things to worry about later on that day.

The meetings went well. I started my trip back home a bit later than usual but I made sure to leave with two of my colleagues Nuha, the Head of the Human Resource department, and Riham, the External Relations Officer. We took a taxi to the Birzeit side of the checkpoint. When we got off, we started our walk towards the other end in order to catch another taxi home. After walking half the distance, we saw about ten Israeli soldiers pointing their guns at a crowd of more than a hundred Palestinians, stopping them from passing across the checkpoint. We, the three women, were alone on one side with the soldiers. The crowd started to march slowly towards the soldiers, hoping to pass the checkpoint and to get home. Suddenly, one of

the soldiers fired a gas bomb at the crowd. Against all expectations, the fumes blew to our side, as the wind was blowing towards us. The three of us started battling for breath, with runny noses, burning throats, and tears in our eyes. We ran forward, with our eyes closed, trying to reach for some tissues in our bags. None of us had any, but suddenly Riham gave us something to wipe our eyes and noses with. We were still battling for breath when we looked at our hands, and found that each one of us was using an "Always" sanitary napkin to wipe our eyes and noses with!

I guess like all other Palestinians, we knew we had to find a way to deal with the obstacles of occupation.

LSE Union Demands Divestment from Israel

"The London School of Economics Students' Union (LSESU) yesterday [Feb 14th 2008] voted overwhelmingly to call on its university and the National Union of Students (NUS) to divest from companies that provide military and commercial support for the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, condemning the decades of human rights abuses and systematic oppression that has occurred as a result.

A motion, brought to the weekly Union General Meeting of more than 400 LSE students by the LSESU Palestine Society, resolved to lobby the LSE and NUS to divest from companies that provide military support for the Israeli occupation, facilitate the maintenance of the illegal "annexation" wall or operate on illegally occupied land or within Jewish only settlements. With a six to one margin, the Union voted to support the aim of targeted divestment until companies cease such practices or until Israel ends its discriminatory oppression and colonisation of Palestinian communities.

The Union also resolved to affiliate to the international campaign to end the siege on Gaza and engage in education campaigns to publicise more widely the injustices of Israel's discriminatory policies. This includes working with Palestine solidarity organisations such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians, the British

Committee for Universities in Palestine (BRICUP), the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Zochrot and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHAD), in a bid to end the legalised racial and religious discrimination in Israel.

This has been the result of much debate on LSE's campus over recent weeks, following an earlier motion which acknowledged growing public comparisons made between Apartheid South Africa and the legalised ethnic segregation that has been imposed for decades by the Israeli state. As such, the original proposed motion was amended to provide consensus across the Union in unequivocally condemning Israel's policy of ethnic segregation, with 339 students voting in favour of divestment compared to just 46 against."

BRICUP needs your financial support

As the pace of boycott activity increases we need your financial support. We are spending most of our reserves on a substantial, and well overdue, redesign of our website. We need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that an ever busier campaign demands.

You can make a one off donation

- by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK
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