

BRICUP Newsletter 55

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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Argument for the Boycott of an Israeli University.

BRICUP has learned that York St. John University (YSJ) is collaborating with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (HUJ) to organize a conference on “Mediating Peace: Reconciliation through Art, Music and Film”. The conference is planned to take place in November but BRICUP has written to urge YSJ University to cancel its participation and to end

its association with HUJ until that University ends its complicity in Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine and its human rights abuses against the Palestinian people. (1) The following is a summary of our letter: the full letter can be read on the BRICUP website at www.bricup.org.uk .

The call for an academic boycott from Palestinian civil society. In 2004, inspired by the effective cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), supported by key Palestinian civil society organizations, issued a call for the academic and cultural boycott of all institutions involved in Israel’s system of occupation, colonialism and apartheid (2).

The boycott movement adopts a nonviolent, morally consistent strategy to hold Israel accountable to the same human rights and international law standards as other nations. It asks the international academic community to heed the boycott call, as it did in the struggle against South African apartheid, until “Israel withdraws from all the lands occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; removes all its colonies in those lands; agrees to United Nations resolutions relevant to the restitution of Palestinian refugees rights; and dismantles its system of apartheid”(3). Since the international community continues to turn a blind eye to Israel’s colonial and oppressive policies, we believe that the only way open to achieving justice and upholding international law is through sustained pressure on Israel from Palestinian and international civil society.

The question of academic freedom. The Israeli academy is not the bastion of dissent and liberalism it is purported to be by those who seek to defend Israel by delegitimizing the call for academic boycott. The vast majority of the Israeli academic

community is oblivious to the oppression of the Palestinian people--both inside Israel and in the occupied territory--and has never fought to oppose the practices and policies of their state. A petition drafted by four Israeli academics merely calling on the Israeli government "to allow [Palestinian] students and lecturers free access to all the campuses in the [occupied] Territories, and to allow lecturers and students who hold foreign passports to teach and study without being threatened with withdrawal of residence visas," was endorsed by only 407 out of 9,000 Israeli academics – less than 5% of those who were invited to sign it. (4)

There is a specific case for the boycott of the HUJ.

Theft of land. On 1 September 1968, the Israeli authorities illegally confiscated 3345 dunums of Palestinian land (5). Part of this land was then used to build the Mount Scopus campus of the HUJ. This confiscation was illegal since it is part of East Jerusalem, which is an occupied territory according to international law. By moving Israelis (staff and students) to work and live on occupied Palestinian land, the Hebrew University is in grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Conventions.

Close association of the HUJ with the Israeli Military and Security Machine. All Israeli academic institutions, maintain close links to the Israeli army, and have contributed to its development. The Israeli academy is not only deeply implicated in providing the ideological basis for Israel's colonial policies, but is also a full partner in maintaining the military and security infrastructure required for the practice of colonialism, occupation and apartheid. The construction of a new military establishment, the National Defence College, has just been announced (6). In 2009, the highly respected joint Palestinian /Israeli Alternative Information Center published a dossier of the complicity of all Israeli academic institutions in the occupation of Palestinian territories(7). The entry for the HUJ describes special arrangements for aiding army reservist students, giving special assistance to students who served in the 2008 military attack on the Gaza strip, specific scholarships for veterans of *Operation Defensive Shield* (which included the destruction of Jenin refugee camp) and partnership and host of the Talpiot academic reserve programme, which trains soldiers in sciences. The dossier also refers to the fact that Carmi Gilon, the HUJ's Vice-President for External Affairs, is past Director of the General Security Services, an organization especially

notorious for torture and human rights abuses of Palestinians. He stands accused of committing war crimes by a number of organizations.

We pointed out that continued engagement with the HUJ has implications. As with the academic boycott during apartheid in South Africa, we believe that participation in academic conferences or similar events in Israel, regardless of the intentions of the participants, can only contribute to the prolongation of this injustice by normalizing, and thereby legitimizing, the *status quo* of occupation and apartheid. We ask YSJ to consider whether it would have participated in such a conference, had it been taking place in a South African university during apartheid. Participation in this conference will, unwittingly, assist the 'Brand Israel Campaign' – Israel's attempt to re-brand its global image through an intense campaign of 'hasbara' (propaganda), portraying Israel as a centre of academic and cultural excellence and as a civilized democracy - thereby diverting attention away from its most pernicious form of colonial control and legalized racial discrimination. The frequent inclusion of Palestinian academics in events like these, either inadvertently or intentionally, contributes to Israel's normalisation agenda, causing damage which far surpasses any academic benefit that may be achieved.

Conclusion. It is impossible to believe that any academic discourse in the setting of the HUJ can have a positive effect sufficient to offset the damage it undoubtedly will do. YSJ has an admirable record of concern and action on human right issues in general, and in relation to the suffering of the Palestinians in particular. Since the international community continues to turn a blind eye to Israel's colonial and oppressive policies, we believe that the only avenue open to achieving justice and upholding international law is through sustained pressure on Israel from Palestinian and international civil society. We ask you to join us in that endeavour.

Notes

(1) <http://www.russelltribunalonpalestine.com/en/sessions/south-africa/south-africa-session-%E2%80%9494-full-findings/cape-town-session-summary-of-findings>

(2) <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>

(3) Ibid

(4) <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=792>

(5) Official Israeli Gazette (Hebrew edition) - Number 1425.

(6) <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=276002>

(7) Keller, U. (2009) *The Economy of the Occupation: A Socioeconomic Bulletin*: Alternative Information Centre. (www.alternativenews.org)

STOP PRESS. As we go to press we have received news of a letter from Kairos Palestine to the conference organizers at YSJ University.

Kairos Palestine is the voice of Christian Palestinians telling the world what is happening in Palestine. "It requests the international community to stand by the Palestinian people who have faced oppression, displacement, suffering and clear apartheid for more than six decades. The suffering continues while the international community silently looks on at the occupying State, Israel. Our word is a cry of hope, with love, prayer and faith in God. We address it first of all to ourselves and then to all the churches and Christians in the world, asking them to stand against injustice and apartheid, urging them to work for a just peace in our region, calling on them to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land."

We thank Kairos Palestine for permission to publish their letter to YSJ University here.

A Call from Kairos Palestine to the Organizers at York St. John University of "Mediating Peace: Reconciliation through Art, Music and Film"

Dear Ms. Kollontai,

Dear Ms. Yore,

Dear Mr. Kim,

Greetings from the Holy Land, cradle of three monotheistic religions, significant primarily for its spirituality.

This letter comes to you from your brethren in faith, from Kairos Palestine, based in Bethlehem in the occupied Palestinian territories. We are sure that you have already heard of our document called "The

Moment of Truth", launched in 2009 (1). With this letter allow us to express our feelings of deep worry and concern about your joint conference with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The history and status of your institution, York St. John University, in existence under different names for several centuries, is a proof of your commitment to God's call, through Anglican roots, to provide a holistic view of an "abundant life" to which we all aspire. We commend and applaud your achievements and your wide array of courses and specializations.

It has come to our attention that the School of Theology in your esteemed York St. John University, is organizing an International Conference on Peace and Reconciliation at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem November 4-6, 2012, hoping that art, music and film can build bridges of better understanding and reconciliation.

We have no doubt that you are aware that academic institutions in particular are part of the ideological and institutional scaffolding of the Israeli settler-colonial project in Palestine, and as such are deeply implicated in maintaining the structures of domination and oppression over the Palestinian people. Since its founding, the Israeli academy has cast its lot with the hegemonic political-military establishment in Israel, and notwithstanding the efforts of a handful of principled academics, is deeply implicated in supporting and perpetuating the *status quo*. We reaffirm once again that the Israeli Academy is not only deeply implicated in providing the ideological rationale and 'scientific' basis for the Israeli colonial policies, but is also a full partner in maintaining the military and security infrastructure required for the practice of colonialism and occupation. At a time when Israel is defying international law, violating the national, human, cultural and social rights of the Palestinian people, acting as the sole "democracy" in the region, how can one think of building peace and reconciliation before removing the very causes that cannot be conducive to a just peace?

The goal of BDS and therefore the goal of academic and cultural boycott is to end the occupation and secure peace and security for all; it is a nonviolent tool (2). From the Kairos Palestine perspective, boycott against Israel "is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for all" (3)

Now we urge you, as Palestinian Christians, to hear our call of faith, hope and love from the heart of our suffering. We urge you to cancel this joint venture and to stop connections with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. What is yet needed is the momentum and commitment of people of faith and courage, who are standing with Palestinians in their struggle for dignity and freedom and seek a just peace. We are confident that, as educators and theologians with a deep sense of following in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, you will seriously take into consideration our call and we invite you to engage in theological discussions with the Palestinian theologians who read the Bible in the eyes of the Palestinian Jew, Jesus Christ.

“Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you willing and able to work with us to restore our freedom? Our freedom will be the only sustainable foundation for both Palestinians and Israelis to live in love, justice, peace and security.(4)

Notes

1. In case you need further details, please visit our homepage at www.kairopalestine.ps

2. <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108> (PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel)

3. From the Kairos document ‘A moment of Truth’, “Our world to the International Community”, p. 16.).

4. From the Kairos document ‘A moment of Truth’, p. 15)

The PACBI Column.

Roger Waters and BDS: Moral Courage and Unwavering Commitment to Human Rights

“Where governments refuse to act people must, with whatever peaceful means are at their disposal. For me this means declaring an intention to stand in solidarity, not only with the people of Palestine but also with the many thousands of Israelis who disagree with their government's policies, by joining the campaign of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel.” – Roger Waters [1]

With this simple yet compelling logic and exceptional sense of moral responsibility to end complicity in the commission of injustice, Roger Waters announced on the pages of *The Guardian* his endorsement of the Palestinian-led, global BDS movement. His move has effectively ushered in a new phase in the spread of BDS to millions across the world who had not previously heard of the budding rights-based movement.

In the same statement, Waters issued a plea to his “colleagues in the music industry, and also to artists in other disciplines” to join the cultural boycott of Israel, in particular, comparing Israel’s system of oppression of the Palestinian people to South Africa’s apartheid regime and recalling how artists boycotted the latter and its infamous Sun City resort as a matter of moral duty.

Roger Waters is certainly not the first nor the only prominent cultural figure to call for a cultural boycott of Israel. World renowned and bestselling authors, including John Berger, Alice Walker, Naomi Klein, Henning Mankell, and Iain Banks; prize-winning filmmakers, including Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, the Yes Men, and John Greyson; violinist Nigel Kennedy and classical guitarist John Williams; the Irish artists union, Aosdana; and Belgian dance sensations Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and Alain Platel were all among many famous cultural figures around the world that have all endorsed one form or another of the Israel boycott in the cultural sphere. Hundreds of artists in Montreal, Canada, Ireland, South Africa and India have also formed artists-against-Israeli-apartheid type groups that have played a critical role in spreading the cultural boycott into the mainstream.

Yet, Waters’s endorsement of BDS carries special significance, given the combination of his eminence in the rock music world where he enjoys a mass base of millions of fans, his inspiring courage in going all the way in advocating BDS, and his unwavering commitment to speak truth to power in defending equal human rights for all humans.

Towards the end of March of this year, for instance, Roger Waters surprised leading international media outlets and millions around the world when he announced at a press conference in Brazil a groundbreaking social forum for Palestine to be held in Porto Alegre later this year. With his typical modesty and charm, he stated:

“I am honored to have been asked by the Palestinian BDS National Committee, to announce an initiative, to hold the World Social Forum Free Palestine in Porto Alegre, Brazil in November of this year, in cooperation with the Brazilian social movement and international civil society networks.”[2]

But he did not stop at that. He explained exactly why he considers himself part of the global BDS movement saying:

“We will continue our call for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, for the tearing down of The Walls of colonization and apartheid, for the creation of a Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem, for the granting of full and equal rights to the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel and for promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as required by the Geneva convention, as stipulated in UN resolution 194, in 1949 and as restated by the International Court of Justice on the 9th of July 2004.”

This level of political awareness and unwavering commitment to Palestinian rights – both extremely rare among stars of the stature of Waters – were born out of Waters’s history of advocating human rights around the world and his unique experience with the question of Palestine, first through his father’s eyes and later through his own. “My conviction is born in the idea that all people deserve basic human rights,” he reminds us. When he visited occupied Jerusalem and Bethlehem in 2006 he wrote: “Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw that day,” adding [3]:

“In my view, the abhorrent and draconian control that Israel wields over the besieged Palestinians in Gaza and the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank (including East Jerusalem), coupled with its denial of the rights of refugees to return to their homes in Israel, demands that fair-minded people around the world support the Palestinians in their civil, nonviolent resistance.”

And when human rights activists, advocating for divestment of the Presbyterian Church USA from corporations that profit from Israel’s occupation, asked for Roger Waters’s support during his most recent US concert tour, he did not hesitate, despite the potential damage that a pro-BDS position may cause given the bullying and intimidation tactics adopted by Israel lobby groups. He wrote a moving opinion column in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette where he stated in crystal clear language his support for the Presbyterian divestment drive [4]:

“I applaud the Presbyterian initiative. In fact, I support the more wide-ranging BDS campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel and have called on my fellow musicians to follow suit, just as we did in opposition to apartheid South Africa.”

Roger Waters has set an example in moral responsibility and in redefining the role of artists, especially illustrious ones, in using their unique access to the world stage to stand up for rights, for justice and against all oppression. For this and everything else that Waters has stood for, he has won the hearts and deep appreciation of Palestinians and people of conscience everywhere.

Notes

[1] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/11/cultural-boycott-west-bank-wall>

[2] http://rogerwaterstour2012.blogspot.com/2012_03_01_archive.html

[3] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/11/cultural-boycott-west-bank-wall>

[4] <http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/opinion/perspectives/divest-in-israel-presbyterians-should-support-palestinian-aspirations-642882/>

PACBI

Batsheva’s UK tour and the “Don’t dance with Israeli apartheid” campaign .

The Batsheva Dance Company, officially described as “Israel’s National Dance Company”, is to tour the UK in August – November: the company receives financial support for its international tours from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is the same government that, for over six decades, has maintained a system of occupation, dispossession and apartheid, and which has left millions of Palestinians as refugees, often imprisoned by a matrix of checkpoints, the illegal apartheid wall, militarized Israeli settlements and Jewish-only roads.

Batsheva is an active participant in the ‘Brand Israel’ programme which was launched in 2005. Brand Israel is a government public relations initiative that uses cultural productions to distract from Israel’s daily human rights violations. In 2009 [Arye Mekel of Israel’s Foreign Ministry stated](#), “We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibits... This way you show Israel’s prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war.” But while these efforts to promote a positive image of Israel abroad persist, the Palestinians continue to suffer from Israeli state policies. The abhorrent Israeli practices continue: the ongoing appropriation of Palestinian land; the construction of [223 Jewish-only](#)

[settlements and “outposts”](#) on Palestinian land; the construction of [an “Apartheid” wall](#) in the West Bank to appropriate still more Palestinian land and separate Palestinian farmers from their fields; the [demolition of over 24,000 Palestinian homes](#) since 1967; the killing of over 1400 Palestinians in the 2009 invasion of Gaza, prompting allegations of War Crimes by the [UN Fact Finding Mission](#) under Justice Richard Goldstone. Even Batsheva artist director Ohad Naharin said in a 2005 interview: "I continue to do my work, while 20 km from me people are participating in war crimes...."

The Israeli government's aim is to create a positive image internationally by promoting Israeli culture through artists and groups such as Batsheva. It is a campaign to whitewash Israel's human rights abuses and violations of international law, creating a false image of a 'normally' functioning, democratic country. The reality as described by some of those in the thick of it are:-

Hana Awwad, longtime member of El Funoun, one of Palestine's premiere dance troupes:

“As a Palestinian dancer based in the West Bank, I am prohibited by the Israeli government from traveling to Gaza for performances. Some of our dancers are also prohibited by the Israeli government from ever accompanying the troupe when it performs in neighboring Palestinian cities and abroad.”

Iman Fakhouri, director of the Popular Arts Centre in Jerusalem:

”Two of our dance performances were cancelled because Israel denied our dancers entry to Jerusalem. Israeli forces outside the theatre were trying to remove people by force. Some people, both from the audience and the artists, were beaten up and arrested.”

Aharon Shabtai, leading Israeli poet:

“I do not believe that a State that maintains an occupation, committing on a daily basis crimes against civilians, deserves to be invited to any kind of cultural week. That is, it is anti-cultural; it is a barbarian act masked as culture in the most cynical way...”

The Batsheva Dance Company is scheduled to perform at the Edinburgh International Festival at the end of August and then to tour the UK during October and November, taking in Salford, Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester, London, Brighton and Plymouth. What can you do? Write letters to the directors of the host theatres arguing for

immediate withdrawal of the performance. If that proves unsuccessful then, if you live nearby, mount a sufficient protest at the site to make it clear that we do not welcome “barbarian acts” here.

The venues are as follows:-

Edinburgh Playhouse

Thu 30 Aug 2012 at 7.30PM , Fri 31 Aug 2012 at 7.30PM, Sat 1 Sep 2012 at 7.30PM

Edinburgh, Festival Theatre

Tue 30 Oct 2012 at 7.30PM , Wed 31 Oct 2012 at 7.30PM

The Lowry, Salford Quays

Fri 2 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM , Sat 3 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

Bradford, Alhambra Theatre

Tue 6 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM , Wed 7 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

Brighton Dome, Concert Hall

Fri 9 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM, Sat 10 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

Birmingham Hippodrome

Tue 13 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM, Wed 14 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

Leicester, Curve Theatre

Fri 16 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

London, Sadler's Wells

Mon 19 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM, Tue 20 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM , Wed 21 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

Plymouth, Theatre Royal

Fri 23 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM, Sat 24 Nov 2012 at 7.30PM

Information from Scottish PSC

A Tainted Brand

Veolia is the French company that built the light railway to link Jerusalem to the settlements. In response to pressure, the Museums Service of Liverpool has cancelled a Veolia Environnement sponsored exhibition that was due to start in July. A Museums Service official explained that there had been much internal discussion within the council regarding the wisdom of using this exhibition, in particular the ethical issues associated with the sponsorship. The Museums Service felt that they did not have the resources to deal with the reputational

issues and damaging consequences of hosting the exhibition. As a result of their concerns, Liverpool has cancelled the Veolia-sponsored event and negotiated an alternative exhibition with the Natural History Museum. This substitute exhibition, entitled "Wild Planet", is also a photographic exhibition and its subject is the same as the Veolia-sponsored exhibition i.e. the wonders of the natural world. As such it will appeal to the same audience as the Veolia-sponsored Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition without attracting the opprobrium associated with that company.

The annual Veolia Environnement sponsored Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the Natural History Museum in London has been the target of protests against Veolia's sponsorship since 2010, both in London and on tour. Efforts are underway to persuade the organisers to cancel the exhibition at another venue.

Material from Angus Geddes.

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are expensive. We need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands.

Please do consider making a donation .

One-off donations may be made by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or

by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at

Sort Code 08-92-99

Account Number 65156591

IBAN = GB20 CPBK 0892 9965 1565 91

BIC = CPBK GB22

If you use the direct funds transfer mechanism please confirm the transaction by sending an explanatory email to treasurer@bricup.org.uk

Like all organisations, while we welcome one-off donations, we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

You can [download a standing order form](#) here.

More details can be obtained from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

Notices

The Cornell-Technion Partnership.

The July edition (Newsletter 54) contained a brief account of the New York campaign against the Cornell-Technion Partnership. We plan to publish more information about this important campaign and expect that it will be ready for the September issue.

Letters to the Editor

Please note that we do have a "Letters to the Editor" facility. We urge you to use it. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of the campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month's newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible. Letters and comments should be sent to newsletter@bricup.org.uk

You can follow BRICUP on twitter!

See twitter.com/bricup

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk