



ביה"ס סם שפיגל לקולנוע ולטלוויזיה – ירושלים
The Sam Spiegel Film & Television School- Jerusalem

15.10.2010

,Dear Mike

The startling notice that you're canceling your long-announced visit has struck me quite hard. I am certain that the decision is sincere and that it reflects your detailed, legitimate political views, and your deep disappointment with Israeli policies. Yet the academic-cultural boycott of Israel, which you have now joined, does not arouse the Israeli public, nor its humanitarian elements, which are already aware of the evils of the occupation. Instead, the boycott actually weakens public concern. And weakens us. Boycotts and ostracism are the antithesis of dialogue

Thousands of Israelis are active in hundreds of organizations that champion peace and coexistence, roundly denouncing acts that are non-democratic or unethical, and promoting Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. Hundreds of protestors take to the streets each week to oppose their government's policy, and they do this despite the strident condemnation and criticism of large portions of our

population here. Over the decades Israeli filmmakers (joined by artists from the full cultural gamut) have used documentaries and features to grapple with the myriad strata of the conflict's complexities. Those carrying out these courageous, controversial endeavors are people who see no contradiction between their being Israelis, Jews and Zionists and their belief in humanitarian, ethical principles, or identifying with the suffering of others. They fight, to a great extent, against the denial of this harsh reality by other Israelis

The Sam Spiegel School, the Cinemateques of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, the Israeli Film Fund, the Israeli Artists' Unions: directors, scriptwriters and producers, the Association of Screen Actors, the Cameri Theatre, the Beit Zvi Acting School--- have all rallied in a show of rare enthusiasm and involvement in this educational visit, as you generously termed it. They look forward to hearing the intimate personal introspections of such an insightful, renowned director, scriptwriter and playwright as you. They want to

hear you as you are, and your political stands are, of course, an integral part of who you are

The students, teachers, artists and various professionals from these institutions who are waiting to hear you are not the elected government of

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Israel, nor are they responsible for its policies. By this boycott that you are effectively imposing in canceling the visit, you are creating an association between the actions of the cultural-artistic genre and the policies of the government and the military--- an exceedingly disturbing, sad generalization. Your visit could have enabled you, at our initiative, to visit “Cinema Jenin” and speak to their students and teachers. Cooperation with Cinema Jenin is just one example of the efforts our school makes to give rise to a dialogue which could sow more seeds of friendship between two nations, the majority of whose people aspire only to live a normal life

We agreed to convene a press conference where you had an open platform to express your sharp objections to Israeli policy, should you have desired. The reverberation of the words you spoke here—from Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jenin—would have been heard so much differently. Here, too, you were presented with the genuine opportunity to speak to hearts and minds, and have a direct influence upon public awareness and opinion. To touch the future. To try to change the realities. Yet now you have chosen to stay distant

I am certain that the decision to cancel the visit was taken following much deliberation and anguish. I know that you wanted to come, to share experiences and impart your wisdom with students and Israeli filmmakers, stage people, and your Israeli fans. I know that you wanted your two sons to have a first-hand look at Israel and to meet relatives who live here. I can only imagine the intense anguish that comes of involvement and of concern. I truly respect your honesty. But in light of your arguments, the public will interpret your decision as indicating an irrevocable rift between us

a boycott of Israel, and a rebuke of its current and future artists. To me, this is a red line. Thus, I cannot justify your decision

When we met in 2008 at the Sarajevo Festival, it was after an excellent master’s workshop you gave to students from Southeast Europe. You told how you work for long weeks privately with each actor, and only after you’ve given him a full insight into his character and how he interacts-- and bolstered the actor’s confidence-- do you finally hold a wider rehearsal between him and his partners. This touched me greatly as an educator and a director

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Mike, I urge you to reconsider your decision. The disappointment here is profound

,Yours in friendship
Renen