

## **HEBREW UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE DEALT TWO SIGNIFICANT BLOWS**

Statement from Campaign to Boycott the Oral History Conference at Hebrew University  
December 4, 2013

We are pleased to announce that the planned June 2014 "International Oral History Conference" being organized by Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been dealt a double blow with the cancellation of their two international keynote speakers: Alessandro Portelli (Italy) and Mary Marshall Clark (USA). The university's claim to be hosting the "first international oral history conference" was unfounded when they made it; it is even less true now.

Much to our disappointment, Portelli, despite cancelling his keynote address, will still be attending the conference and participating in a workshop. Nevertheless, no longer a featured speaker, Hebrew University has been denied the opportunity to use his name to cover up its deep complicity in violations of international law and human rights.

We welcome Clark's full withdrawal from the conference, on the other hand, which has been met with praise and support from academics concerned about Israel's cynical use of international figures to cover up its regime of occupation and apartheid.

We continue to call on Portelli and other international oral history practitioners and scholars from all disciplines to refuse to participate in this or any conference at an institution that is as deeply complicit in Israel's flagrant and persistent infringement of Palestinian human and political rights as the Hebrew University.

The initial campaign launched four months ago by Palestinian, Israeli, North American and British oral historians -- among other academics -- has now been endorsed by almost 400 academics, including many oral historians, from 27 countries in Europe, South Africa, Asia and Oceania, as well as North and South America.<sup>1</sup> We thank all those international scholars and professionals who, by adding their names to the public letter/boycott call, are heeding the 2004 Call of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). This calls not only for the boycott of academic and cultural institutions involved in Israel's system of occupation, colonialism and apartheid but also to "refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with *Israeli institutions*."

While all Israeli universities are deeply involved in Israel's regime of oppression against the Palestinian people, the Hebrew University is particularly noteworthy.<sup>2</sup>

- The land on which some of its Mount Scopus campus buildings and facilities were expanded was acquired as a result of Israel's 1968 illegal confiscation of 3345 dunums of Palestinian land, land which is deemed occupied territory under international law.
- It maintains close ties to the Israeli military industry, which is accused of war crimes against Palestinian civilians; provides special privileges to Israeli soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> For the list of signatories, go to: <http://www.aurdip.org/Call-to-Boycott-the-Oral-History.html>

<sup>2</sup> To see the detailed documentation regarding Hebrew University, see the letter/call cited above

and security personnel; and collaborates with the Israeli army in training officers and recruits.<sup>3</sup>

- It discriminates against Palestinians, including those who are citizens of Israel, by failing to provide teaching services to the residents of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas in contrast to those provided to Jewish groups; and not offering any courses in Arabic.
- It denies freedom of speech and protest to its few Palestinian students, as evidenced by the prohibition of a commemoration event during the 2008-2009 Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip during which approximately 1,400 Palestinians were killed; at the same time, offering special consideration and benefits to student-soldiers who participated in that invasion.
- The staff from the Hebrew University take part in the supervision and promotion committees of students and staff at Ariel University, which is illegally built on confiscated Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank.
- It does not recognize degrees awarded by the Palestinian Al-Quds University in Jerusalem while those awarded by the Ariel University in an illegal colony are recognized.

The call to boycott the “international” oral history conference at the Hebrew University is part of the growing international tide to hold Israel accountable for its violations of Palestinian human rights and international law. From Cape Town to Catalonia, Sydney to San Paolo and London to Lahore, faculty and students are challenging their institutions to honor the Palestinian call for a non-violent response to Israeli apartheid and colonialism, as they had done against apartheid institutions in South Africa. Even in the US, as Alex Lubin has noted, what Edward Said dubbed “America’s last taboo” was broken, as senior scholars and youthful students vigorously debated an academic boycott resolution at the American Studies Association conference – the outcome of which is still being determined.<sup>4</sup>

We call on oral historians and related professionals and activists around the world to honor the boycott and refuse to be a party to sanitizing the reputation of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and to covering up its close association with Israeli occupation and settler-colonialism.

*To sign on to the public letter/boycott call, email:  
hebrewuconferenceboycott@gmail.com*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/files/2011/02/EOO23-24-Web.pdf>; <http://www.idf.il/1283-13885-en/Dover.aspx> ; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talpiot\\_program](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talpiot_program)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.merip.org/breaking-%E2%80%99America%E2%80%99s-last-taboo%E2%80%9D>. See also David Lloyd, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/taboo-boycotting-israel-has-been-broken/12949>. Earlier this year the Asian American Studies Association passed an academic boycott resolution (<http://www.usacbi.org/2013/04/aaas-votes-in-historic-decision-to-support-boycott-of-israeli-academic-institutions/>)