

BRICUP NEWSLETTER

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As I compile this issue of the BRICUP Newsletter I am repeatedly distracted by BBC News broadcasts that alternate visions of hell in Gaza with smooth-talking Israeli army and government officials regurgitating lies and distortions. Factual interviews with Palestinians are infrequent. I shout at the TV, " Hamas is a legitimate political party elected by the Palestinian people in 2006." But this democratic result was not recognised by Israel and the West, leading to the electorate being subjected to lack of food, water, medical supplies and energy, severe restriction of movement and random acts of violence, all of which made normal life impossible. In these circumstances, I for one, do not find it surprising that Hamas (and Fatah) have military wings. Has Israel learned nothing from history? I recall that, of the 1.5 million inhabitants of Gaza, 1.2 million are Nakba refugees who, in 1947-49, were ethnically cleansed from the land they had lived in for 2000 years. Contrary to the Israeli propaganda, uncritically relayed by the BBC, Hamas has consistently offered Israel a cease-fire if it will cease military action, open the crossings and enter into meaningful talks. In solidarity with our colleagues and friends in Gaza, now terrorised from land, sea and air, this issue of the Newsletter will focus on the continuing Nakba.

David Pegg

In Gaza as the storm clouds gathered.

Just 2 weeks before Israel's onslaught on Gaza in the dead news period after Christmas, Mike Cushman and Jonathan Rosenhead were in Gaza.

There was an uneasy calm. Everyone knew that an Israeli assault was imminent – no one knew when it would occur or exactly what pretext would be used. The circumstances we found there were dire – and that was before hundreds more were killed and the remaining infrastructure pulverised.

How did we come to be there? The short answer is that between Monday December 8th and Friday December 12th the two of us travelled to Gaza on the Free Gaza ship Dignity. The Free Gaza Movement had sent out an urgent request for academics to travel on the boat. Our journey was storm-tossed; but a later trip has faced far greater dangers.

On Dec 29th, as the Israeli bombardment continued, Dignity attempted to take medical supplies and 3 surgeons to help Gaza's hard pressed health system deal with the human

consequences of Israel's bombardment. It was rammed 3 times by Israeli warships, and prevented from getting through. Free Gaza is a wonderful organisation and will need funds to repair Dignity or buy a replacement. You can donate at

<http://www.freegaza.org/index.php?language=EN&module=donations>

By December 29th the need was for surgeons. But 2 weeks earlier the call was for academics. We were needed as some kind of guarantors that the boat would be able to get both in and out, past the Israeli navy. Why academics? Because there are many hundreds of students trapped in Gaza, unable to get to the university places they have been offered round the world. The main function of this, the 4th blockade-running Free Gaza voyage, was to bring out as many of these trapped students as possible. When Dignity left Gaza we had eleven of them with us, who will now study in Britain, Canada, Greece, Kazakhstan, Germany and the Netherlands. But so many more were left behind.

Given the situation of these trapped students, the fuss that the Israeli state and its friends in the UK always make about the possible infringement of

academic freedom by an academic boycott of Israel is deeply ironic. The boycott, at the request of PACBI, is institutional rather than individual – so it hits Israeli universities only in their pride and their wallets. But the blockade by Israel has devastated the academic plans and prospects of countless Gaza students. Their places and funding to study abroad are waiting for them and they cannot go. Nothing abstract about that.

Consider Zohair, who now had a place on offer on a masters course at Imperial College. Originally he had a Fulbright Scholarship to study in the US, but the blockade meant that he lost it. Years are being lost from the academic lives of hundreds of students.

For the boat to get from Larnaca to Gaza we had to run the gauntlet not only of the Israeli navy but also of a Force 9 gale. The boat had few passengers: an Al Jazeera 2-man crew, an ISM volunteer, a British medic who had been refused entry from Israel to continue her reconstructive surgery sessions in Gaza, a Gaza man who had been unable to return and had not seen his family for four years, and members of the Free Gaza team. The rest of the space was taken up with medical supplies donated (without publicity) by quite surprising agencies, and by baby formula supplied by Friends of Yibna in Britain. The space vacated by these supplies would be utilised by students on the way back.

The arrival of Dignity at the port was greeted with enthusiasm, as were we everywhere we went. Not too many visitors have arrived in Gaza during the month after month of the Israeli siege. We had a ceremonial audience with Ismail Haniyeh, and the Minister of Education spent half a day with us as we toured educational establishments in North Gaza which had been damaged by previous Israeli military action. We also visited the Islamic University. Throughout our 2 days in Gaza we were filmed by a variety of TV crews, and gave impromptu and scheduled interviews - in TV studios, at a hospital, on the dockside...

Since our visit the University, Ismail Haniyeh's house, the Ministry of Education and the port have all been bombed, as has the Agricultural

College we visited in Beit Hanoun, while the Dignity has been rammed.



Part of the Agricultural College in Beit Hanoun. Students used to study here.



But no more...after the Israeli Airforce visited in an earlier bombardment..

Our days in Gaza had a packed programme, and we can pick out only some incidents and events:

- Our hospital visit was at Rafah in the south, providing care to nearly 200,000 people. The doctor in charge made no attempt to exaggerate the problems they laboured under. They were getting on with treating patients as best they could. But the supply of medicines was visibly small (we visited the pharmacy). All cancer drugs and many more were unavailable anywhere in Gaza; the UN tally was 105 missing drugs - and that was before the Israeli attack. The hospital's ultrasound was not working – its transducer had broken under the strain of frequent power

What's happened since



outages. The Israeli blockade prevented them getting a replacement part. Electricity cuts badly affected dialysis patients; kidney transplants were only possible in Egypt or Israel. You might as well say they could be carried out on the moon.

- At the southern tip of Gaza, near the (closed) Rafah crossing into Egypt we visited Gaza International Airport. Costing \$86 million, with funding from countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, its opening in 1998 was attended by both Yasser Arafat and Bill Clinton. The 4000 square metre 2-story terminal building is of Islamic design and copious decorative Moroccan tiles. Correction – we visited what used to be the Gaza International Airport. The radar station and control tower were destroyed by the IDF in 2001. Israeli bulldozers cut up the runway in 2002. Now the obviously once graceful terminal building is a shambles – an empty shell looking as if a bomb has hit it. But actually the damage was done from within. Previously the terminal had included a VIP lounge, 2 restaurants etc. The vindictiveness of the spree of wanton destruction speaks volumes for the mindset of the Israeli soldiers who inflicted it.

- In Rafah we visited the spot where Rachel Corrie had been murdered by Israelis demolishing a house she was trying to protect. Nearby we visited the blockade busting tunnels: the vital lifelines bringing essential food, medicines and fuels. They had been built under the wide swathe of houses, Philadelphia Road, demolished some years ago by the Israelis to prevent tunnelling. The tunnels just got longer. Since our visit these tunnels too have been bombed.

- On the way back to Gaza city our little bus stopped so we could sample some of the luscious strawberries on sale cheaply at the roadside. They were quite delicious. Of course they had been grown for the international market. Now those which could not find some local sale would rot.

- On the same road we passed an abandoned half-built residential development. Funded by the UN and Saudi government, it was intended to house some of those whose homes at Rafah had been demolished. It is incomplete because no building materials have been allowed into Gaza by the Israelis. Unless the siege is ended, there will be no way, either, of repairing the bombed buildings and infrastructure.

- We drove along the coast road. Until the Israelis withdrew, the beautiful sand-dune beach was inaccessible to Gazans, the preserve of the 10,000 Israeli settlers who occupied the best 40% of Gaza. One day there will be a flourishing tourist industry in a free Gaza. It was noticeable however that, although there were many people on the beaches, there were none in the sea. We found the reason just south of Gaza City – the outflow of Gaza's sewage works. Without fuel and spare parts, raw sewage is poisoning the sea, with an appalling smell. In a poignant irony this sewage is now becoming a threat to Tel Aviv's tourist trade.

- We met with Dr John Ging, director of UNRWA's Gaza operation. He was forthright in his condemnation of the slow strangulation of Gaza, and the interference with UNRWA's food convoys on which the majority of Gaza's inhabitants depend. Things were getting so much worse. In 2007 the Israelis had merely destroyed the local economy and agriculture. Now...

- We had two well-attended meetings with the University Teachers Society of Palestine, the Gaza university trade union, totalling around 3 hours. Since our return, UK members of Engage have asked us about Hamas oppression of this union. Strangely enough, in a very free and forthright discussion we heard nothing about this. What they all wanted to talk about was the Israeli siege, and its disastrous effects. Indeed they had some creative ideas about how academics in countries such as Britain could play a constructive part in increasing the pressure to end it.

- Another key meeting was with representatives of a range of civil society organisations at the offices of the Al-Dameera Association for Human Rights. The meeting was chaired by the undisputed leader of Gaza civil society Dr Eyad Saraj of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme. (that Programme's buildings have now been wrecked by bombing), and the End the Siege Campaign. The discussion ranged from sexism within the Palestinian organisations combating the occupation and siege; through the undermining effects of disunity between Hamas and Fatah, the West Bank and Gaza; to the increase in renal failure, heart disease and cancer as a result of siege-induced privations.

At each meeting the people we talked with were encouraged by our actual physical presence that the world had not forgotten Gaza. We were met by a clear and consistent demand: end Israeli impunity. And repeatedly we were told what we could do about it: engage civil society worldwide in a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

We now know that most of the public buildings we visited in Gaza have been wrecked by bombing and shelling. What we don't know is whether the homes of the people we met are still standing, or if they or their families are still alive and uninjured.

For now all our efforts are directed to the campaign to get this criminal assault halted. In the longer term the contacts we made, and the ideas we gathered, will help in the much longer campaign to achieve an end to the occupation and self-determination for the Palestinian people.

You can see photos from our visit at:-

<http://picasaweb.google.com/PalestinePhotos/GazaPhotos#>

Mike Cushman, Jonathan Rosenhead

The PACBI column

Gaza, January 5th, 2009.

As the lethal assault upon Palestinian society in Gaza—upon women, men, children, whole families, neighborhoods, communal institutions, civil society organizations—enters its second week, we cannot find the right words to express our outrage and our condemnation of this latest wave of ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and near-genocide being carried out against the Palestinian people. Yet, we must remain focused on what we and those in solidarity with us around the world must do to bring an end not only to the ongoing carnage but also to end the multi-faceted oppression of the Palestinian people.

As the opening salvos in the war declared against the Palestinians were being fired, the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee, BNC, called upon international civil society “not just to protest and condemn in diverse forms Israel's massacre in Gaza, but also to join and intensify the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel to end its impunity and to hold it accountable for its persistent violation of international law and Palestinian rights.” We concur with the judgment of the BNC that “without sustained, effective pressure by people of conscience the world over, Israel will continue with its gradual, rolling acts of genocide against the Palestinians, burying any prospects for a just peace under the blood and rubble of Gaza, Nablus and Jerusalem”[1].

In subsequent days, appeals were issued by several Palestinian associations of academics calling for boycotts of Israel. The Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUPE), the main Palestinian academic union, condemned the bombing of the campus of the Islamic University in Gaza and urged “academics around the world to intensify their boycott of Israeli academic institutions, and to isolate the Israeli academy in international forums, associations of academics, and other international venues” [2]. The appeal from the Palestinian Association of University Teachers in Gaza [See below in this Newsletter.] urged “all peace-loving, freedom-loving nations, NGOs, universities, intellectuals, cultural and academic institutions, trade unions and syndicates, as well as human rights organizations all over the world to...immediately impose boycotts, sanctions and divestments on the Apartheid Israeli state...Israel is a rogue state that is a threat and danger to world peace and security; therefore she must be banished and punished by the international community, before it is too late for the people of Palestine, the people of Israel and the people in the surrounding countries” [3]. A statement issued by the Union of Teachers and Employees of Birzeit University (the local branch of PFUPE) declared the Union's determination to redouble efforts to promote the academic boycott of Israel [4].

International supporters of Palestinian rights also issued strong statements of solidarity and condemnation, and a number called for the imposition of sanctions and boycotts. BRICUP's "A Statement of Determination to Boycott Israel" [See below in this Newsletter.] led the way, declaring, "enough is enough. As long as the state of Israel continues to defy humanity and international law, we, the citizens of the world, commit ourselves to boycotting Israel" [5]. The latest and most encouraging message we have received is that issued by the newly-formed Scottish Committee for the Universities of Palestine, a group of academics and similar professionals established as a sister organization to BRICUP. We salute this effort and commend our Scottish colleagues for urging Scottish civil society to "respond to the call issued by their Palestinian counterparts in adopting the BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) campaign and generate international pressure where the multinational institutions have been remiss" [6]. What has been the response of the Israeli academy? We have noted earlier, in response to the initiative launched by four Israeli academics to secure the endorsement of their senior colleagues in Israel on a petition in favor of academic freedom – in fact, less restricted passage at checkpoints -- for Palestinian faculty and students [7], that PACBI was neither surprised by the dismal results of the initiative nor by the morally and politically deficient content of the petition. We noted then that the petition ignored the basic political context within which the academic freedom of Palestinian academics and students in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza is being violated, namely, the illegal, four-decades-old military occupation of Palestinian land, an occupation that has striven consistently to destroy Palestinian society and its institutions, including universities and other educational institutions [8].

Today, at the height of this massacre being carried out by the Israeli army and the willful destruction of a good part of the campus of the Islamic University in Gaza, the Israeli academy is silent. Perhaps administrators and faculty are busy tackling the administrative and academic nightmares that have been thrust upon them at

such short notice as a result of the massive call-up of army reservists to take part in the ongoing criminal assault on 1.5 million Palestinians incarcerated in the world's most densely populated ghetto. Like most "good" Israelis, Israeli academics are already at the front, duly contributing to the unprecedented war crimes carried out by their army, without a pang of conscience.

Dubiously ignoring the main themes of Palestinian civil society demands, as expressed in the above mentioned statements, some Israelis who call themselves "leftists" have tried to recapture their lost role as gatekeepers for Palestinian aspirations, issuing banal articles and commentaries that tend to equate the oppressors with the oppressed and reduce what needs to be done to mere expressions of condemnation and appeals to Israeli decision makers. Still, a tiny, almost insignificant, minority of Israelis deserves commendation for issuing a distinguished petition [9] that is relatively in harmony with Palestinian society's demands. The bankruptcy of the Israeli academy is apparent for all to see; we cannot discern any principled, moral leadership emanating from that self-centered world of business-as-usual, even at the height of this carnage and while Gaza bleeds. Comprehensive institutional boycott remains the most effective measure solidarity groups can take to help stop the massacre and to uproot Israel's entrenched system of apartheid.

[1] http://www.pacbi.org/announcements_more.php?id=852_0_5_0_M

[2] http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=856_0_1_0_C

[3] http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=863_0_1_0_C

[4] The statement was issued on January 3, 2008 and distributed during a rally on campus.

[5] http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=854_0_1_0_M23

[6]
http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=864_0_1_0_M23

[7]
<http://academic-access.weebly.com/>

[8]
http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=792_0_1_0_C

[9]
<http://www.petitiononline.com/freegaza/petition.html>

PACBI

BRICUP issues a Statement of Determination to Boycott Israel.

Gaza's Guernica. Enough is enough.

The Israeli government is sending waves of F16 fighter jets to bomb the Palestinian population of Gaza, many of whom are already weak and sick from two years of siege and encirclement by Israel. Children, says an Israeli spokeswoman, are legitimate targets because if they inhabit a house allegedly being used to manufacture home-made rockets to fire into Israel, they are 'terrorists' themselves. On Saturday December 27, Israel says it dropped 100 tonnes of bombs on Gaza. We say enough is enough. As long as the state of Israel continues to defy humanity and international law, we, the citizens of the world, commit ourselves to boycotting Israel.

When Nazi planes firebombed the Basque town of Guernica in 1937, to advance General Franco's revolt against the democratically elected Republican government, Britain, France and other European powers continued to refuse military and political support to the Republic, and Franco and his Nazi allies prevailed.

Since our governments decline to take action against Israel, we, as citizens, must act. We declare that, in solidarity with the bombed, maimed, tortured and ethnically cleansed people

of Palestine, we will, individually and collectively:

- refuse to buy any fruit, vegetable, flowers, cosmetics, underwear, swimwear or piece of technology manufactured or produced in Israel or the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and we will inform shops that we object to them stocking Israeli products;
- we will not go on holiday to Israel; we will research which brands of computer contain Israeli-designed and manufactured components, make the information public, and press all computer manufacturers to end research partnerships with Israel;
- we will boycott Israeli films, theatre companies, dance groups and orchestras, and make known our objections to the management of theatres and cinemas;
- we will campaign actively for our governments not to allow citizens of our countries to serve in the Israeli army, navy, airforce and security services;
- we will lobby in our professional organisations and trade unions for Israeli institutions to be boycotted unless they state publicly that they oppose their government's actions, will not co-operate with the state (for instance by teaching courses for the security services, which all Israeli universities do), and support the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

BRICUP says 'The EU must hold Israel to its Agreements.'

The following letter was published in the Guardian newspaper on January 5th. A copy was sent to the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband

Sir,
Despite the EU's call for a ceasefire, the brutal Israeli bombing of Gaza continues. Nonetheless, the EU is preparing to upgrade its existing agreement to give Israel even more privileged

access to European institutions.

In December, the Council of Ministers voted to support this upgrade, ignoring the fact that Israel was in breach of an 'essential element' of the earlier agreement. This required States to respect "human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement." The proposed upgrade is even weaker, and includes no obligations on Israel in respect of its illegal settlements, the illegal wall, and its repeated breaches of international human rights and international humanitarian law.

In view of the horrific events of the past days, we now call on:

1. The UK Government to revoke its support for any new agreements with Israel and for this to be communicated forthwith to the Czech presidency of the EU in advance of its meeting with the Commission and to the EU Council of Ministers
2. The European Parliament to refuse to endorse any extension of existing agreements and to use its influence to prevent any upgrades of EU benefits to Israel until it abides by its international legal and humanitarian obligations.

226 signatures

The association of University Teachers in Gaza calls for help (January 4th 2009)

Bethlehem - Ma'an - The Palestinian Association of University Teachers in Gaza calls upon all peace-loving, freedom-loving nations, NGOs, universities, intellectuals, cultural and academic institutions, trade unions and syndicates, as well as human rights organizations all over the world to:

1. Immediately impose boycotts, sanctions and divestments on the Apartheid Israeli state.
2. Try the Israeli generals for their on-going crimes against the Palestinian people.

3. Demand a halt to Israel's savage aggression, end its brutal occupation and lift its suffocating and lethal siege on the Gaza Strip.

4. Implement all UN resolutions related to the inalienable national rights, particularly UN resolution 194 calling for the right of return for the Palestinian refugees to their homes and their property from which they were uprooted by the terrorist Zionist gangs in 1948.

5. Comply with 4th article of the Geneva Convention, the international human rights law, the international humanitarian law, and the universal declaration of human rights as well as all other related agreements.

6. Lift the draconian blockade against Gaza as stipulated by the 1948 convention on Genocide, and consider anyone participating as a war criminal who must be tried for crimes against humanity.

Israel is a rogue state that is a threat and danger to world peace and security; therefore she must be banished and punished by the international community, before it is too late for the people of Palestine, the people of Israel and the people in the surrounding countries.

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your help to support its campaigning activities.

You can make a one-off donation or a regular payment by standing order. Standing order forms are available at www.bricup.org.uk/documents/StandingOrder.pdf

More details from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

Comments and suggestions concerning the Newsletter are always welcome.

Email to newsletter@bricup.org.uk