

BRICUP NEWSLETTER

Number 18

July, 2009

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Keith Hammond was in Gaza four months after the end of the massacre. This is his report.

Though I have travelled to the West Bank many times, it was only at the end of May that I managed to get into Gaza. I got in with an extremely organized group of American activists called Codepink – codepink4peace.org. Once through the Rafah crossing I found destruction everywhere. It was clear that the target of the twenty-two day massacre, beginning just after Christmas, and just before the inauguration of Obama, had not been Hamas but had in fact been the whole population of Gaza. It was also clear that even with the Israeli army moving from village to village, and from house to house in some areas, the Israelis had achieved nothing. The Palestinians still reject Israeli violence. Palestinians still struggle for justice as the only basis of an enduring peace, and as on so many other occasions since 1948 and 1967, the Palestinians maintain their dignity in facing up to one of the most advanced armies of the modern world. The struggle for freedom in Gaza goes on as none of Israel's objectives were achieved. The call coming out of the ashes of destruction is for solidarity movements to build the boycott everywhere. What ever emerges from the current diplomatic maneuverings, Israel must be put under pressure. The Zionist state now led by Netanyahu must be let know that people around the world are for freedom and justice and therefore are with the cause of Palestine.

The call for a boycott came up everywhere. Wherever there were public or municipal buildings there had been massive destruction and the loss of innocent life. Roads, power plants and water pipes had been bombed. Ministry buildings, police compounds, libraries and

Mosques had been targeted. University science buildings, UN centres, and schools had been hit. Even food storage units and chicken farms had been bombed. Simultaneously, attacks had come from the air, sea and ground forces. A huge amount of fire power had been unleashed on this tiny area of land that is one of the most densely populated areas of the world. The stories I heard were horrendous. I visited trade unionists, community groups and all sorts of organisations of civil society and everywhere the call was for us to step up the global boycott and disinvestment of Israel. Solidarity now has to be focused around putting the Zionist state of Israel under real pressure with an international boycott. No matter what happens in the UN with the various reports that are being produced, the boycott campaign must be given new energy.

What was reported as a 'war' was in reality nothing like a war. War suggests a roughly equal conflict. But this was not the case. Gaza, in main, was without any means of defending itself against the sophisticated killing technology of Israel. If it had been a war then where were the Palestinian anti-aircraft guns? If it had been a war then where was the early warning system letting the people of Gaza City know F16s were in the air? Where were the shelters? Gaza had been attacked in the full knowledge that it could not defend itself from this kind of attack. In fact, Gaza had been attacked because it could not defend itself. The intention had been to punish the one and a quarter million people in the strip. What met me as I arrived in Gaza was endless destruction and the tragic loss of life in every community. What met me on the Palestinian side of the crossing was an international crime of horrendous proportions. Everywhere I looked I saw evidence of collective punishment, a reminder to the people of Gaza that they now

live or die according to the policies of Israel. As I moved further up the Strip and up to Khan Yunis the destruction got worse. The scene that I came across represented a new stage in Israeli aggression. Gaza 2009 will go down in Palestinian history alongside many other massacres. Yet the stories I came across were not the stories of a defeated people. They were however an expression of desperation on the Israeli side. Zionism has no answers outside of more and more violence. Israel now feels that the call for a boycott is being picked up around the world. But it is not being picked up nearly enough. Following the Scottish Trade Union movements resolution, the international boycott and disinvestment campaign must be broadened and deepened with more and more determination. The action must be followed through. Indeed, it must be stepped up everywhere.

Some homes in areas along the coast of Deir Al Balah that I visited had been hit by rockets, artillery and then finally by M-16s. Some families had to leave their homes, move to the homes of relatives in Gaza City and then find that these homes were targeted hours later. I heard of families moving several times in the same night! Children everywhere were still traumatised. I talked to a cameraman who had been directed to go out and cover a raid on one area where he found he was filming the body of his own brother. Major networks then quizzed him on air about the role of Hamas in his brother's death. He was asked who was really to blame for the tragedy. He answered that it had not been Hamas M16s that had killed his brother! Stories like this were endless. I visited one NGO, which looked after children, whose sight had been irreparably damaged by phosphorous sprays and bombs. Three year olds sat in class staring ahead of them, looking very nervous as they were introduced to us. It was heartbreaking to hear of how many of these toddlers had become orphans. The circumstances in which their parents had died were horrific. But the real tragedy continued in that the paper needed for blind children learning brail was not allowed into Gaza. Israel has a list, we were told and only those 'emergency' items

on that list could be gotten into Gaza. So the dehumanization just went on and on. These blind toddlers in Gaza were not even thought to be worthy of the same paper needed by blind children elsewhere. So if it was not the illegal use of phosphorous sprays, then it was the withholding of materials needed to get over the injuries that had resulted from these sprays. There seemed to be no end to the punishment of these wonderful people who simply want justice. This sort of treatment will only end with an international campaign that really hits Israel. It is no good appealing to any sense of common decency. Israel has moved well beyond such an appeal. Look at its disregard for international law and then its cover up of such denials. Israel will only put the brakes on its campaign of hate when it feels pressure from the ordinary people in each and every nation in the same way that South Africa felt the pressure in the anti-apartheid movement. Exactly the same anti-Zionist campaign has to be built now in relation to Israel.

I was told that warehouses were full of materials on the Egyptian side of the crossing, and just kilometres down the road in Al Arish. Much of this was decaying because it had been stored well beyond its 'use by' date. Yet nothing was being said or done. No outcry. Suddenly everyone looks the other way when it comes to the Palestinians. Why? It seemed that when aid did get through it was never exactly what Gaza had specified. Again I asked why? Who takes note of Palestinian needs? Aid was much more likely to be what donor countries felt they could give and much less likely to be what Gaza felt it needed. Again I kept asking myself why in the case of these people it was acceptable. Whether it is an international blockade or Israeli bombing, the result seemed to be the same in that considerations of Gaza as an area full of real human beings just does not seem to figure in the considerations. Palestinians are constantly reminded that their life does not count. Palestinian life is now held in the balance and more than ever determined by international apathy and the irrational fears of Zionism. All this becomes almost visible for anyone crossing into Gaza now. At the crossing itself I saw no

trucks waiting to cross into Gaza, even though there is still an acute need of certain medicines. I spoke to French Doctors who had waited three days to get into Gaza. Why? Gaza is not a humanitarian cause. I heard no one calling for sympathy. The people of Gaza want what is right for everyone – justice. Its needs are not vague but are specific. It needs building materials. This means pressure has to put on Egypt for to open the crossing so that these materials can go into Gaza. This has to be a priority.

Regardless of the Egyptian leadership, students and academics in Cairo and elsewhere have to be encouraged to take local solidarity action. More and more Egyptian citizens are joining the camp at Rafah, trying to get the crossing open. This crossing has never really been open. Routinely it humiliates Palestinians who are fortunate enough to get through. Some extremely ill Palestinians have to wait for days on either side, or inside the crossing, just so that they might get out for treatment. The solidarity camp on the Egyptian side has to be built. What good is a Brotherhood if no one acts upon it? Houses cannot be rebuilt unless the materials are available. Material and international support must be able to go through Rafah. In Lebanon after the 2006 August War, people were able to rebuild quickly. But not the Palestinians of Gaza. Once again these people are thought to require special treatment. Piles of rubble are everywhere. People have done as much as is possible to clean things up but there is nothing getting rebuilt and this is unacceptable. When it comes to building materials, Gaza is completely sealed off. Rafah must be opened! This is an imperative. International solidarity must be encouraged in moving to open the border.

Gaza is a sealed unit. Even now in this tiny stretch of land no one inside Gaza dare go within one kilometre of the Israeli fence. Smallholders cannot tend to their land. Picking olives or getting in the tomatoes is impossible. Food prices are going through the roof. Water is scarce everywhere but especially in the camps, small villages and rural communities. Women and children still stand in line for water in so

many areas. Bottled water is the only safe water but not everyone can afford it. Nutritious food is scarce. Boats still have to fish in terrifying conditions. Each night I spent in Gaza I heard the sound of Israeli gunboats shooting at fishing boats that had gone too near to the three mile limit. So two years of the blockade and four months after the massacre Gaza's situation has become considerably worse. It has become worse because people are taking their eye off the ball. We still need to build the boycott campaign. There has been progress - as in the UCU - but the real task has to be in extending the boycott and keeping up with everything that goes on in Gaza. We need to make the campaign bite, especially in Europe. All this became clear as soon as I walked through the crossing at Rafah.

After all this destruction however, it is clear that none of Israel's stated aims have been achieved. Israel did not defeat Hamas. What Israel did was show how far it was prepared to go in punishing the population of Gaza. A year or so back Ghanim – 'Thanatopolitics: The Case of the Colonial Occupation in Palestine' - described the whole massacre well before it happened as 'the management of death and destruction'. It would be difficult to look at some of the destruction around Jabalia, as I did and not agree with her. Once again Palestinians are living in tents. There are not even enough to go around. Clinics have been destroyed the length and breadth of Gaza. Evidence of the punishment of an entire people is everywhere. Ghanim explains that the power we are now witnessing involves the 'continual threat of death' that is placed over Gaza as 'a permanent shadow' now. That shadow will only be removed with a boycott. When I saw row after row of tents alongside piles of rubble where there had once been village buildings I felt I was seeing confirmation of everything Ghanim described well before the massacre. Israel has punished the people of Gaza because they still insist on justice for Palestine. The irony is that with every instance of punishment, the resistance deepens, spreads and becomes stronger. People in Gaza continue to live life the best way that they can. For these people there is no future outside of resisting Israel's barbarism. This was echoed everywhere

where the message was the same. A young student from the Islamic University where the science block had been destroyed said to me before I came back: 'tell everyone that we are suffering after this but we are strong and want a boycott' ... After twenty-two days of hell, the only life affirming response to Israel is an all out boycott. Let us play our part in the UCU as elsewhere and build the international boycott campaign.

Keith Hammond

Appeal against the appointment of Dr Yoram Blachar, longstanding President of the Israeli Medical Association, as President of the World Medical Association.

The following open letter has been sent to the Chair of Council of the World Medical Association.

Dear WMA Council Chair Dr Edward Hill and the Council,

We the undersigned 725 physicians represent both academic medicine (114 professors) and clinical practice in 43 countries. A matter of grave concern to us, and a threat to the public reputation of the World Medical Association, has brought us together in this perhaps unprecedented medical initiative. We wish to publicly protest and appeal against the recent appointment of Dr Yoram Blachar, longstanding President of the Israeli Medical Association, as President of the World Medical Association. We believe that his Presidency makes a mockery of the principles on which the WMA was founded in 1947, which was as a response to egregious abuses by German and Japanese doctors in World War Two.

The WMA's own Declaration of Tokyo (1975) specifies that "physicians shall not countenance, condone or participate in the practice of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading procedures, and in all situations, including

armed conflict and civil conflict". The WMA Annual General Assembly of 2007 made it clear that inaction was not an option, stating that "this is the first time the WMA has explicitly obliged doctors to document cases of torture of which they become aware. The absence of documenting and denouncing such acts might be considered as a form of tolerance and of non-assistance to the victims".(1) There are still more recent calls from authoritative academic sources for the international medical community to go much further in actively allying itself with efforts to suppress mistreatment of prisoners. (2)

Amnesty International concluded as long ago as 1996 that Israeli doctors working with the security services "formed part of a system in which detainees are tortured, ill treated and humiliated in ways that place prison medical practice in conflict with medical ethics". (3) Dr Blachar, already IMA President, took no action. Amnesty's briefing to the UN Committee against Torture in September 2008 "focuses on Amnesty International's (continuing) concerns about Israel's failure to implement the Convention against Torture in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the intensification of measures amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment"(4).

A well publicised report in 2007 by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), based on the detailed testimony of 9 Palestinian men tortured between 2004 and 2006, gives a graphic demonstration of the extent to which Israeli doctors continue to form an integral and everyday part of the running of interrogation suites whose output is torture (5). The IMA have conceded that they were aware of this report, but did nothing. More recently, at a meeting on December 10 2008 in Tel Aviv, with Dr Blachar presiding only weeks after his inauguration as WMA President, Physicians for Human Rights Israel again sought (unsuccessfully) to get the IMA to face this report and all the other evidence in the public domain.

In its 2008 annual report to the UN Committee Against Torture, the UAT Coalition, a coalition of 14 Israeli and Palestinian human rights

organisations, concluded that "since the Committee last reviewed Israel, the practice of torture and ill treatment has continued unabated. The UAT Coalition wishes to inform the Committee that in its opinion the use of torture and ill treatment by Israeli authorities against Palestinians is both widespread and systematic. The UAT Coalition has recorded evidence of acts, omissions and complicity by agents of the State at all levels....until this culture of impunity is addressed this situation is unlikely to improve".(6)

In November 2008, PCATI filed a contempt of court motion to the High Court of Justice against the government of Israel and the General Security Service for their responsibility for a policy that grants a-priori permits to use torture in interrogations. The IMA have never challenged torture as state policy in Israel.

Dr Blachar went as far as to justify the use in Israel of "moderate physical pressure" (condemned as torture by the UN Committee Against Torture) in the fourth paragraph of a letter published in the international medical journal *The Lancet* in 1997 (7, and attached pdf). This surely unprecedented action by the president of a national medical association has not been disowned, and renders him unfit for the office of WMA President. In the age of evidence-based medicine his rejection of the documentary record has been unprofessional and frequently contemptuous. On the British Medical Journal (BMJ) website he dismissed a BMJ paper on health and human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories- which cited Amnesty, Johns Hopkins University, the International Court of Justice, a UN Rapporteur and Physicians for Human Rights Israel- as "the lies and filth he spews and "reminiscent of some of the worst forms of anti-semitism ever espoused" (8) Indeed Dr Blachar has made statements which were untrue, and which he must have known were untrue, on at least 10 occasions in the *Lancet* and the *BMJ* in the past decade.(9) Given that these 2 international medical journals are amongst the world's most prestigious and influential, this is an intended corruption of the public record. (The cited

references are available on request)

IMA membership of WMA appears to have been a figleaf: The IMA website pays lip service to medical ethics but Dr Blachar has overseen a studied failure to take the actions mandated by the Declaration of Tokyo.

We conclude that under Dr Blachar's leadership the IMA made a decision on political grounds years ago to turn a blind eye to torture in Israel and the institutionalised involvement of doctors. This stance continues with Dr Blachar as WMA President. On an issue that goes to the heart of the moral authority of the profession, Dr Blachar has offered shameful ethical leadership to doctors in Israel and worldwide.

It could scarcely be more scandalous that he now assumes the Presidency of the official international body overseeing medical ethics. This appointment will seriously damage the public reputation of the WMA and its work, and risks making it a laughing stock. We call upon the WMA Council to oblige Dr Blachar to step down as a matter of priority. Since the WMA is mandated to ensure that its member associations conform to its codes, we also request an investigation into the IMA record highlighted above.

In view of the public importance of this issue we are copying our letter and supporting documentation to international medical journals and mainstream newspapers for coverage.

We hope to hear from you and the WMA Council as soon as possible please.

Signed by Prof Alan Meyers, Boston University, and 724 other physicians from: United Kingdom, Canada, USA, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Italy, South Africa, Norway, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Malaysia, Switzerland, Algeria, Iraq, Eire, Spain, Australia, India, New Zealand, Germany, France, Sweden, Pakistan, Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Greece, Libya, Turkey, Bahrain, Belgium, Peru, Syria, Qatar,

Nigeria, Czech Republic, France, Zambia, Denmark, Dubai, Kuwait, Argentina.

To date no response has been received from the WMA Council. However Dr Blachar has made his own response plain in interviews in the Jewish Chronicle, London, and in a headlined article in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronot. He is quoted as saying "it's a joke....it seems Dr Summerfield is simply obsessed...a personal vendetta that has gone on for many years". He also says "if we go through the names, you will see that many of them are Arab physicians, either from Arab countries or working elsewhere....it is not surprising that they found a platform for their anti-Israseli attitude". He adds "some of the signatories are ex-Israelis, which smacks of self-destruction and is inexplicable to me". Blachar makes it clear that the voices of Arab physicians (and of Palestinian victims of torture) do not count, which is surely racist. He makes no attempt to address the evidence base which underpins our call. These responses illustrate in themselves why he is unfit for the office of WMA President. We note that at least one counter-campaign has been launched to lobby the WMA on behalf of Dr Blachar.

**Dr Derek Summerfield
UK Medical Committee for Palestine
BRICUP.**

The PACBI column

Leonard Cohen's planned token performance in Ramallah.

PACBI is heartened to hear thatance in BDS activists in the UK, including BRICUP, are organizing a demonstration and picket when Leonard Cohen performs in London on July 11th. Their call, "don't play Israel!" has resonated in several other venues where Cohen is playing before his planned concert in Tel Aviv later this summer.

After exhausting all attempts to convince Cohen to apply his avowed humanistic principles in a

morally consistent way by refusing to entertain Israeli apartheid and whitewash its crimes, we called on all supporters of a just peace in our region to shun Cohen's concerts and CDs and to protest his appearances everywhere. In an open letter to Cohen in May, we warned that we considered his performance in Israel a form of complicity in its grave violations of international law; we reminded him that by violating the Palestinian boycott against Israel he would bring back the ugly memory of artists who violated the boycott against apartheid South Africa and insisted to perform at Sun City, drawing condemnation and revulsion by people of conscience the world over [1].

PACBI's position regarding news reports that Cohen plans to perform in Ramallah the day after his Tel Aviv gig is clear.

We have always rejected any attempt to "balance" concerts or other artistic events in Israel--conscious acts of complicity in Israel's violation of international law and human rights--with token events in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Such attempts at "parity" not only immorally equate the oppressor with the oppressed, taking a neutral position on the oppression (thereby siding with the oppressor, as Desmond Tutu famously said); they also are an insult to the Palestinian people, as they assume that we are naive enough to accept such token shows of "solidarity" that are solely intended to cover up grave acts of collusion in whitewashing Israel's crimes. Those sincerely interested in defending Palestinian rights and taking a moral and courageous stance against the Israeli occupation and apartheid should not play Israel, period. That is the minimum form of solidarity Palestinian civil society has called for.

We feel that this is an occasion to reaffirm our position first articulated two years ago in relation to visits to the occupied Palestinian territory by academics, performers and artists who wish to show solidarity with Palestinians while primarily coming to Israel to perform or participate in academic or artistic activities. As we noted then,

Palestinians have always warmly welcomed solidarity visits by international visitors; however, most Palestinians firmly believe that such solidarity visits should not be used as an occasion to give lectures at Israeli universities; organize performances, film screenings or exhibits in mainstream Israeli venues; collaborate in any way with Israeli political, cultural or academic institutions; or participate in activities sponsored or supported -- directly or indirectly -- by the Israeli government or any of its agencies [2].

The Cohen team's motives may not be so innocent, however. We believe that the plan for Cohen to perform for Palestinians is an effort to defuse the bad publicity and animated demonstrations by BDS activists at performance venues in several cities. Cohen's managers probably feel that by adding a Ramallah gig at the last minute, they can deflate the growing protest and the PACBI call for boycott against the tour. While this is a reflection of the positive effect the boycott call has generated, it also shows that Tel Aviv is still on the tour agenda. More protests and more publicity about the boycott are needed, and this is why the planned demonstration in London on the 11th is so welcome.

[1] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1006>

[2] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=539>

PACBI

BDS really is biting !

Ned Curthoys reports from Australia that he and his colleagues are having a phenomenal response to their petition against the forthcoming Australia-Israel cultural exchange involving Australian parliamentarians, journalists, academics, and business people. So far over 170 have signed, including many Australian academics. The petition will be presented to the deputy prime-minister Julia Gillard and other Labor MPs.

[We plan to print the whole petition in our next issue. *Editor*].

David Klein invites us to endorse the **U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel** [1]. The campaign is seeking the support of academics, writers, artists, musicians, poets, journalists and so on. David is a member of the Organizing Committee and he is asking us to join more than 50 international scholars, over 300 U.S. academics along with dozens of writers, poets, musicians, and other cultural workers by adding our names to the list of academic endorsers, listed on their website [2]. There you will find the campaign's mission statement and a list of Advisory Board members that includes Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ilan Pappé, Adrienne Rich, and many others [3]. (David Klein is a Professor of Mathematics at California State University, Northridge.)

[1] <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/>.

[2] <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/>

[3] <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/advisory-board/>

Fourteen Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel have written to Prof. Jessica Benjamin, urging her to reconsider her visit and cancel her planned lectures in Israeli institutions.

They write, "As activists against the occupation of Palestine, we view struggles for freedom of oppressed peoples and struggles against other forms of oppression as inter-related. Therefore, feminist lectures given in Israeli universities, which are institutions that support the very foundation of the occupation of Palestinians, may be feminist in content, but surely not in essence. We believe that ignoring the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel is tantamount to sending a message of support to the Israeli establishment [...] It is a time for people around the world to unite around the Palestinian call to boycott Israel. Especially after the murderous assault on Gaza, the movement is gaining momentum worldwide."

Signed: Ronnie Barkan, Dr. Dalit Baum, Shai Efrati, Naama Farjoun, Prof. Rachel Giora, Eilat Maoz, Dr. Anat Matar, Haggai Matar, Rela Mazali, Dr. David Nir, Jonathan Pollak, Ayala Shani, Omer Sharir, Dr. Kobi Snitz .

The Yes Men have withdrawn their highly acclaimed new film from the Jerusalem Film Festival where it was scheduled to be shown. In their letter to the organizers they write:-

“Dear Friends at the Jerusalem Film Festival,

We regret to say that we have taken the hard decision to withdraw our film, "The Yes Men Fix the World," from the Jerusalem Film Festival, in solidarity with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (<http://www.bdsmovement.net/>). This decision does not come easily, as we realize that the festival opposes the policies of the State of Israel, and we have no wish to punish progressives who deplore the state-sponsored violence committed in their name. [...] We feel a strong affinity with many people in Israel, sharing with them our Jewish roots, as well as the trauma of the Holocaust, in which both our grandfathers died. [...] But despite all our feelings, we cannot abandon our mission as activists. In the 1980s, there was a call from the people of South Africa to artists and others to boycott that regime, and it helped end apartheid there. Today, there is a clear call for a boycott from Palestinian civil society. Obeying it is our only hope, as filmmakers and activists, of helping put pressure on the Israeli government to comply with international law.” They conclude” to those who want to see our film, *savlanut* and *sabir* (patience)! And for all the rest of us, a little LESS patience, please”.

Samia Botmeh is compiling a growing list of Trades Unions that have adopted positions or passed resolutions that support BDS of Israel.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions ICTU
The Scottish Trade Union Congress STUC
The University and College Union UCU
Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU)
Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions
Canadian Union of Postal Workers
Los Angeles Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild

Western Australian members of the Maritime Union of Australia
the Federation syndicale unitaire (French teachers unions)
The Bay Area Labor Committee for Peace & Justice
Ontario division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees
The Catalan Workers' Union
National Teachers Federation of Quebec
The list is growing! Please add others you know about. Email to samiabotmeh@yahoo.com

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Recent meetings and lobbying activities have been 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
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Account Number 65156591
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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 www.bricup.org.uk/documents/StandingOrder.pdf More details can be obtained from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

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 always welcome. Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk