

BRICUP NEWSLETTER

Number 22

November, 2009

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The Gaza Freedom March

BRICUP will have a delegation on the Freedom March in Gaza on the 31st December 2009. We will march with our Palestinian colleagues, along with PACBI and the BDS groups from all around the world. This will be an extraordinary event.

Anyone hoping to join the march should sign up to CODEPINK on their 'Freedom March' website or alternatively contact them on Info@gazafreedommarch.org

In order to get through the border crossing it is advised that we get onto the CODEPINK list.

Anyone intending to join the march should be in Cairo early Sunday the 27th December 2009 and expect not to be back in Cairo any earlier than January 2nd, 2010 – extremely late! It is best that flights be arranged around these dates. So get flights for Cairo before December 26th 2009 that return no earlier than the 3rd January.

Also anyone planning to be on the march should contact Keith Hammond on keith.hammond1@gmail.com

A fact sheet and briefing notes will then be sent out to all those making the trip. This will be very important for the people of Gaza and a big boost to the boycott and disinvestment campaign.

Link up with Action Palestine

Action Palestine - the student co-ordinating network for Palestine - and BRICUP have been meeting up recently to discuss ideas for co-operating on a national level. We've found a lot

of areas for joint initiatives - the proposed speaking tour in March, boycott campaigning over the upcoming week of action, even a joint tour of Palestine. But as well as this national co-operation, we think that it's vital that students and academics link up on a day-to-day basis on their local campuses.

We are asking BRICUP and Action Palestine activists to take the initiative to organise meetings with each other and hold joint events.

As well as the obvious practical advantages of this - it seems nonsensical to be running two separate campaigns on one campus – there is also a more general point about momentum. Campaigning momentum is often strongest when it brings together people from all areas of the university community. To a certain extent, therefore, much progress could be made at some universities simply by linking up already-existing supporters of the Palestine movement.

For good reason, BRICUP does not release the contact details of its supporters. However, at Action Palestine we display the details of many university Palestine societies openly on our website: <http://www.actionpalestine.org/contact/> If your campus is not listed on that page, or if you have any queries, feel free to contact us at comms@actionpalestine.org

Volunteer in Palestine with Project HOPE

Who are we? A grassroots International Palestinian and Canadian run NGO nestled in the heart of the West Bank, Nablus.

What do we do? Project Hope offers English, French and First Aid lessons as well as activity-based classes (such as Photography, Art, Sports etc) to the children, youth and adults in the refugee camps, schools and the university in Nablus.

What's our story? Set up in the thick of the 2nd Intifada by a Canadian man and Palestinian woman in their mid-20s, Project Hope is to date one of the main functioning NGOs providing education in the area. Still going strong 6 years later, we are expanding to other West Bank cities as well as opening an Arabic language learning centre.

What are we looking for? Enthusiastic, talented and resourceful volunteers with an interest in the area. Project Hope has hosted volunteers offering classes ranging from photography to murals, French and English, to theatre and graphic novels. Ingenuity and enthusiasm are wanted

What are your placements like? Each volunteer placement lasts for a minimum of four weeks. Depending on your skills, you will be assigned suitable classes to teach in the educational centres in Nablus. Every lesson is attended by a Palestinian volunteer assistant-instructor who acts as a translator. The International volunteers all live together in the Project Hope flat and on weekends you're free to travel as you please.

Any extras? We offer free Arabic lessons (Palestinian dialect) for all volunteers twice a week and we invite guest speakers to give talks about Palestine and the conflict. Local Palestinian volunteers also run a series of informative tours around the city, including discussing how it is affected by the conflict and occupation.

For more information please contact:-

email: projecthope@projecthope.ps
website: www.projecthope.ps

Students Disrupt Israeli Foreign Minister's Lecture at the LSE

Over 50 students and activists greeted Minister Ayalon outside of the lecture on LSE's campus with placards and banners, whilst inside audience members heckled the controversial Minister as a "racist" and "murderer" in relation to the illegal occupation and violence carried out by the Israeli state.

Ayalon was in the UK to meet British government officials and was speaking at the LSE ahead of these talks in a lecture titled "The Middle East: The View From Israel". Security at the university was tight, with private security and police officers keeping a close watch on protesters. The Minister began and ended his lecture amid boos and chants of "Free, Free, Palestine" whilst his speech was interrupted relentlessly throughout with audience members questioning Israel's atrocities.

The action was organized by the LSE Students' Union Palestine Society and the Palestine Solidarity Initiative. For more information go to these links:

LSE SU Palestine Society: www.palsoc.org.uk
Palestine Solidarity Initiative: www.palestinesolidarity.org

The Academic Boycott and the complicity of Israeli Universities

The well-known and respected Alternative Information Centre (AIC) has just produced an excellent report on the "Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories." It covers a good deal of the ground of the 2007 BRICUP pamphlet "Why Boycott Israeli Universities" but with additional and up-to-date information. The report very usefully classifies information on Israeli academic support of the occupation in two ways: first according to the type of involvement; but then

according to each institution. The types of involvement identified include: the provision of R&D services to the Israeli Armed Forces (IAF); the discriminatory support of Israeli soldiers rather than Palestinian students; participation in Israeli military training; direct involvement in the Israeli occupation; allowing senior IAF officers to influence University policies; stifling political dissent in Israeli Universities. There is considerable evidence, especially at the Technion and at Tel Aviv University, concerning university links with the defense industry, the dependence of the IAF on technology developed by Israeli universities and of the universities' dependence on financial support by the defence industry. There is detailed coverage of the benefits that universities offer to Israeli soldiers, especially those who served in operation Cast Lead, on military-specific training, and on discrimination against Palestinians. The report demonstrates unequivocally that Israeli academic institutions have not opted to take a neutral, apolitical position toward the Israeli occupation but rather they fully support the Israeli security forces and their policies toward the Palestinians. The report notes that the Israeli security forces are the prime proponents of the occupation and therefore any aid given to them is support for the occupation.

There is also a section on the history of the academic boycott movement and on comparisons with the boycott of apartheid South Africa. The report asserts that "From an economic perspective Israel is far more vulnerable to an academic boycott than apartheid in South Africa ever was." The writers distinguish two types of boycott ; the first ('ideological boycott') is specifically directed against organizations or companies whose activity directly support the occupation; the second ('tactical boycott') does not distinguish between individual organizations but is directed against the Israeli policy of occupation. There is more discussion of the philosophical basis of academic boycott generally arguing for the first 'ideological' or targeted approach. Readers will find the data invaluable and the discussion stimulating. The full report is available at the following link:

<http://www.alternativenews.org/the-economy-of-the-occupation/2223-the-economy-of-the-occupation-23-24-academic-boycott-of-israel.html>

The PACBI column

Implementing the Academic Boycott: Individuals vs. Institutions

We have shared with readers of the BRICUP Newsletter the recently publicized PACBI guidelines for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel [1]. We are very heartened by the steady mail we have been receiving in recent months from academics, artists, and activists around the world who contact us to ensure that their implementation of the boycott in their particular circumstances and contexts is in harmony with our guidelines.

While implementing the cultural boycott of Israel may sometimes encounter grey areas due to the fact that artistic activity is not limited within institutional boundaries (and PACBI calls for an institutional boycott), we believe that the situation is a great deal clearer when it comes to practicing the academic boycott. We offer the following advice in response to questions from some academics about attending conferences held at or sponsored by Israeli academic institutions. There has been an inaccurate impression that since the Palestinian boycott call is institutional, only institutions are expected to observe it. By this logic, individual academics, if they are not representing their universities or institutions, may participate in academic conferences in Israel without breaking the boycott. For the sake of clarity, we note that when we advocate an institutional boycott, we mean that the target of the boycott should be all Israeli institutions; those whom we urge to implement the boycott, however, are institutions as well as individual academics.

PACBI believes that we have not yet reached the critical point where international academic

institutions and bodies will boycott Israel and refrain from cooperating with Israeli institutions. Regardless of that, we believe that the success of the academic boycott hinges on the consistent and principled practice of individual academics faced with opportunities or invitations to attend conferences organized by Israeli academic institutions. There is no doubt in our mind that such opportunities and invitations must be rejected.

We would like to reiterate that PACBI has advocated a boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions, based on the premise that these institutions are complicit in the system of oppression that has denied Palestinians their basic rights guaranteed by international law. This position is in line with the authoritative call by the Palestinian Council for Higher Education for "non-cooperation in the scientific and technical fields between Palestinian and Israeli universities." Israeli academic institutions in particular are part of the ideological and institutional scaffolding of the Zionist colonial project in Palestine, and as such are deeply implicated in maintaining the structures of domination 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, carries on business-as-usual in support of the status quo.

By attending conferences in Israel, international academics - whether intentionally or inadvertently - effectively lend legitimacy to the Israeli colonial project; they affirm that Israeli universities are a normal member of the international academy, and that no special stigma attaches itself to the Israeli academy. The message these academics send is that Israeli academic institutions can continue to enjoy recognition, legitimacy, and approval from academics the world over, not to mention unfettered access to research funds and other material benefits. As a matter of fact, and judging by the unprecedented outpouring of support for BDS the world over, we believe that the uncritical acceptance of the Israeli academy

as a neutral and untainted institution is being challenged. More and more principled academics are realizing that they should withdraw their "stamp of approval," as it were, and join the academic boycott.

We stress that as a general overriding rule, virtually all Israeli academic institutions, unless proven otherwise, are complicit in maintaining Israeli apartheid and colonial rule, whether through their silence, actual involvement in justifying, whitewashing or otherwise deliberately diverting attention from Israel's violations of international law and human rights, or indeed through their direct collaboration with state agencies in the design and commission of these violations. Accordingly, these institutions, all their activities, and all the events they sponsor or support must be boycotted.

We trust in the sense of justice of our international colleagues to do what is right: boycott the Israeli academy and all its activities and projects!

[1] PACBI Guidelines for Applying the International Academic Boycott of Israel: <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1107>; Guidelines for Implementing the International Cultural Boycott of Israel: <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1047>

BRICUP writes to the British Council in support of a British student involved in a joint UK/Israel, BIRAX-funded, project.

To Mr Martin Davidson, Chief Executive, British Council

Dear Sir,
On 16 October last, Professor Jonathan Rosenhead, my predecessor as Secretary of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP), wrote to you expressing our dismay that the British Council should accept responsibility for the administration of the

British-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership (BIRAX). [Newsletter 10, November 2008] Our view was, and remains, that BIRAX is a scarcely veiled political gesture intended to reassure Israel that the British government will oppose an academic boycott of Israeli universities, and that especially as most of the funding for BIRAX comes from pro-Zionist UK organisations, the British Council demeans its reputation by having anything whatever to do with it.

In your reply, you spoke of the British Council's balanced and even-handed approach in all your programmes of support for Israeli and Palestinian higher education. In this context you referred to plans for a new PhD scheme to support Palestinian academia and three recent examples of assistance to Palestinian universities. We do not doubt your commitment to enhanced relations between the higher education sectors of Britain, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories including Gaza. But it should be obvious to you, as it is to practically every humanitarian agency that has reported on conditions in the region in recent years, that the Israeli government is failing utterly in its legal obligation as the Occupying Power to ensure that the people of the Occupied Territories have unhindered access to education, including higher education. Israeli authorities regularly refuse access to Palestinian universities by visiting academics or deny them re-entry to the territories if they leave for any reason. Israeli authorities place obstacles in the way of access to and from Palestinian universities, and make it impossible for Palestinian students to take up places offered to them in universities abroad, including in Britain. More generally, Israeli authorities impoverish the Occupied Territories by systematically obstructing their domestic and external commerce and making it exceedingly difficult to sustain universities in any form. This campaign of obstruction is by now so well documented as to require no further proof. Equally evident is the failure of all but a tiny number of Israeli academics to signal their opposition to the genocidal actions of their own government. In these circumstances, we find it disappointing, to put it no stronger, that the British Council should persist in a policy of

even-handedness between the oppressor and the oppressed.

On Saturday 19 September, Mr Jameel Zayed undertook a private visit to see his grandparents and other relatives in Israel. On arrival at Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv, Mr Zayed was held for 9 hours, repeatedly interrogated, strip searched, verbally abused and denied access to food, then held for another 9 hours in a detention centre before being deported from Israel. Mr Zayed is a researcher in the Department of Chemistry at Cambridge University, a British citizen, a participant in a research collaboration with Israeli partners and a grant applicant to the BIRAX scheme 2009.

Mr Zayed's treatment, which contrasts starkly with the treatment Israeli academics normally receive in Britain, illustrates precisely why we oppose collaboration with Israeli universities. We wish to know if you are aware of Mr Zayed's mistreatment and expulsion from Israel. Second, we wish to know if you will insist upon a suitable apology from the Israeli authorities for Mr Zayed's mistreatment, and assurances that Mr Zayed and all other British participants in collaborative research funded by the British Council shall in future have free and unhindered access to their Israeli and Palestinian research partners. It seems to us that in the absence of an adequate apology and assurances for the future, the only honourable thing for the British Council would be to withdraw its support from all research collaboration with Israeli institutions. Indeed, failure to do so might be construed as condoning racial or religious discrimination, and in breach of UK law.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Robert Boyce, Secretary, BRICUP

We await Martin Davidson's reply. Meanwhile the student himself has solicited the support of his head of department in Cambridge, the vice chancellors of Cambridge University, the Director of Science and Technology at the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Head of Inorganic

Chemistry in Manchester University, the Head of the Royal Society and the Secretary of the UCU.

University of Johannesburg (UJ) Staff Oppose Links with Ben Gurion University

The UJ Management Executive Committee has signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Ben Gurion University. A petition signed by forty-three UJ staff members has been delivered to the Management Executive Committee opposing the agreement. The petition reads :-

As members of the University of Johannesburg community, we wish to express our disagreement with the University's decision to sign a scientific co-operation agreement with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. We believe that this agreement is damaging to our university because it ignores the call of Palestinian civil society organisations to withhold co-operation from Israeli universities which co-operate in human rights abuses. Ben-Gurion University is such an institution. Its president, Rivka Carmi, describes it as a 'proudly Zionist institution' which means that it actively supports the ideology of the Israeli state, which denies Palestinians an equal share of the land of their birth. Ben-Gurion University also offers partial exemption from its degree requirements to members of the Israeli military, thus bending academic requirements to the needs of a military engaged in occupying Palestinian lands in violation of United Nations Resolutions.

We are particularly disturbed that the University has signed an agreement with Ben-Gurion at a time when it has declared that it is seeking legal ways to discipline the head of its politics department, Neve Gordon, for labelling Israel an apartheid state and supporting a non-violent boycott of Israeli companies and institutions which abuse human rights. Clearly, academic freedom is not a value in which Ben-Gurion University believes: the Association for Civil Rights in Israel reacted to the threat to Gordon

by expressing its 'sorrow' that "this is not the first time Ben-Gurion University has misappropriated its duty to stimulate social and political involvement among university staff, and is instead choking differing opinions within an argument between the Israeli public", indicating that this attempt to suppress free thought is not an isolated incident.

In defense of its decision, our university leadership argues that it is being even-handed because it favours partnerships with universities in Israel and Palestine. It says this stance is, in its view, in line with the official policy of the South African government. We respectfully disagree.

The Palestinian people are currently victims of an Israeli occupation which violates their human rights as well as international law. Their plight has been repeatedly compared to that of black South Africans under apartheid by, among others, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former Cabinet minister Ronnie Kasrils. Palestinian institutions are forced to exist in circumstances which are strongly similar to the Bantustan system created by apartheid. To insist that it is even-handed to support Israeli and Palestinian institutions is thus much the same as insisting, during the apartheid period, that it was even-handed to support apartheid institutions as long as Bantustan institutions are supported too. We do not know whether this approach is in line with that of our government – we understand it to oppose the illegal occupation of Palestine which would surely assume non-co-operation with institutions which support that occupation. But, if our government supports the signing of co-operation agreements with institutions which are complicit in human rights abuses, we wish to point out that, in democratic South Africa, universities are not bound by government policy.

In sum, we believe that signing this agreement endangers UJ's reputation as a university justly proud of its commitment to the values of a democratic South Africa because it sends a signal to the world and our Palestinian colleagues that we are unwilling to support their demand for the rights we now enjoy. We appeal to the university's leadership to reaffirm our

university's commitment to human rights and democracy by cancelling the agreement with Ben-Gurion University .

This was signed by 46 academic staff and a letter from UJ alumnus, Professor Haidar Eid of Gaza was attached. He wrote:

“As a graduate of UJ and a resident of Gaza , I find it distressing that UJ has signed an agreement with Ben Gurion University despite the policy of ethnic cleansing and the latest war crimes committed against the people of Gaza . These are not equal sides requiring an ‘even-handed’ approach. All Israeli academic institutions are known to be complicit in Israel 's policy of colonization and apartheid.

Every day, millions of Palestinians are denied the full right to education in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the refugee camps of the Diaspora. Education is denied because of the Israeli checkpoints, the siege of Gaza and the apartheid-like discrimination faced by Palestinian students in Israel . Thousands of Palestinian students and lecturers are in Israeli dungeons often without trial or sentenced by military courts. All credible international human rights and humanitarian organisations have detailed how the Israeli military deliberately targets Palestinian students and schools including UN schools. The recent Goldstone report corroborates these facts.

Palestinians stood with South Africans during the struggle against South African apartheid. We ask you to join us in our struggle against Israeli apartheid. Almost all Palestinian academics and a small but significant number of Israeli academics understand why Israeli institutions must be boycotted in the face of an intransigent, racist and militarised Israeli regime. It is unconscionable that UJ becomes complicit in Palestinian oppression. I have no doubt that the vast majority of the UJ community based on my experience there, believe in the values of social justice and if they were aware of the appalling atrocities I have witnessed, would not hesitate to support the petition opposing links with Israeli institutions. You cannot equate a rapist with a

rape victim. Palestinians are an oppressed people without a state. We increasingly rely on international law and solidarity for our very survival. Israel with the fourth largest army in the world has violated international law and numerous global conventions. Israel 's latest barbarity is the illegal use of white phosphorus against civilians killing 1 400 people including hundreds of children.

International jurists, including South Africans such as John Dugard consider Israel to have committed war crimes. In a comprehensive and meticulous report, senior researchers from South Africa 's own Human Sciences Research Council consider Israel to be an apartheid state. Please join the momentum around the world, particularly among academics, who are heeding the call of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. Reverse the decision of UJ's management executive committee. Don't be on the wrong side of history”.

Prof. Haidar Eid, Gaza , Palestine

Trondheim University to vote on an Academic Boycott

If a majority of its board votes in favour on November 12th 2009, the University of Trondheim in Norway will become the first university in the West to adopt an academic boycott of Israel. On 3 November 2009 PACBI issued an open letter to the Board of Governors of Trondheim University: the text is as follows:

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) applauds faculty members at the University of Trondheim and University College of Sør-Trøndelag in Norway for their principled support for the cause of justice in Palestine by proposing a motion to boycott Israeli universities. This is an historic step in the direction of applying effective pressure on Israel and holding it accountable for its colonial and apartheid policies which violate international law and fundamental human rights. If the motion is passed, these universities

would be the first academic institutions in the world to declare that they will not cooperate with the Israeli academy.

We urge the Board of Governors of the University of Trondheim and University College of Sør-Trøndelag to declare at their upcoming meeting that Israeli universities and academic institutions cannot be normal partners of any self-respecting Norwegian institution. Indeed, it has to be recognized by academics the world over that Israeli universities are part and parcel of the structures of domination and oppression of the Palestinian people. They have played a direct and indirect role in promoting, justifying, developing or supporting the state's racist policies and persistent violations of human rights and international law. Most recently, and only as an example, a Tel Aviv University publication announced with pride that the Research & Development Directorate of the Israeli Ministry of Defense is currently funding 55 projects at the university; it went on to quote the head of the Security Studies Program at the University that "military R&D in Israel would not exist without the universities. They carry out all the basic scientific investigation, which is then developed either by the defense industries or the army." [1] It should be noted that this is the same Ministry of Defense that executed the relentless and bloody war against the Palestinians in Gaza last December and January, murdering over 1400 Palestinians, more than 300 of whom were children, and wounding over 5000 people. Many neighborhoods were reduced to rubble, and educational institutions, such as schools and whole buildings of the Islamic University campus, were destroyed. In general, the Israeli academy sees nothing wrong with partnering with the Israeli military machine, to say the least.

The sincere solidarity with Palestine shown by Norwegian academics is particularly timely in light of the recent Israeli war of aggression against the people of Gaza and the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip. The impunity of Israel must be challenged. Academic and cultural boycotts are effective measures available to world civil society to indicate its intolerance of oppression and as a means to bear pressure upon Israel to

cease its campaign of ethnic cleansing and colonial control over the Palestinian people. The PACBI call for boycott in 2004 of Israeli academic and cultural institutions [2], like the Palestinian civil society's widely endorsed call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) in 2005 [3], is based on the same moral principle embodied in the international civil society campaign against the apartheid regime in South Africa: that people of conscience must take a stand against oppression and use all the means of civil resistance available to bring it to an end.

We urge the Board of Governors to pass the boycott motion in its meeting on November 12, 2009, and to join the growing global movement for justice for the Palestinian people.

PACBI

[1] Tel Aviv University Review, "In Defense of the Nation," Winter 2008-2009. Tel Aviv University: Marketing and Donor Relations Department, 2009.

[2]

http://www.pacbi.org/campaign_statement.htm

[3] <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52>

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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