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University of Johannesburg ends Israeli links: an historic moment for the boycott of Israel movement

On 23 March 2011 a worldwide precedent in the academic boycott of Israel was set - the University of Johannesburg (UJ) effectively severed ties with Israel's Ben-Gurion University (BGU).

This was after UJ's Senate rejected a last ditch motion by pro-Israel lobbyists to have two separate bilateral agreements - one with a Palestinian University and another with an Israeli University. UJ chose instead to uphold its previous Senate Resolution that required taking leadership from Palestinian universities which unanimously rejected any collaboration with BGU and have come out in full support of the academic boycott of Israel. UJ chose to respect this.

UJ is the first institution to officially sever relations with an Israeli university - a landmark moment in the growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. Throughout the campaign, academics and international human rights activists have been anticipating this decision which, coming from a South African institution, is of particular significance. This has set a precedent and must start a domino boycott effect! The movement to end ties with BGU was boosted by the overwhelming support given to the UJ Petition (www.ujpetition.com) in support of UJ academics and students who were calling on their university to end its apartheid-era relationship with BGU. As the UJ senate met today, over 400 South African academics, including nine Vice-Chancellors and

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, had signed the UJ Petition.

Included in the list of supporters are some of South Africa's leading voices: Professors Neville Alexander, Kader Asmal, Allan Boesak, Breyten Breytenbach, John Dugard, Antjie Krog, Barney Pityana and Sampie Terreblanche. South Africa's popular cartoonist Jonathan "Zapiro" Shapiro, Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu, Bishop Rubin Phillips, former Minister Ronnie Kasrils and leading social activist Zackie Achmat also backed the campaign.

Further, over 100 internationals began to lend their support, including several prominent international scholars: Professors Judith Butler, Vijay Prashad, Michael Burawoy, Wendy Brown, Ernesto Laclau, and acclaimed British author, John Berger. On this day UJ made history by upholding and advancing academic moral integrity. Palestinians, South Africans and the international academic and solidarity community celebrate this decisive victory in isolating Israeli apartheid and supporting freedom, dignity and justice for the Palestinian people. UJ now continues the anti-apartheid movement - against Apartheid Israel.

Text issued by the BDS working group (South Africa). See www.ujpetition.com

The PACBI Column

A Month to Celebrate, a Month of Global BDS Accomplishments!

March 2011 was marked by major successes for the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, especially on the academic and cultural boycott front. There is much cause to celebrate, take stock of and continue to creatively and affectively mobilise around, based on the three basic and just demands of the BDS campaign. We hail BDS victories, knowing full well that they are the result of remarkable efforts by people of conscience around the world working tirelessly to support Palestinian human rights. For every victory, we salute BDS activists, from those who stood for hours on street corners leafleting to promote Israeli Apartheid Week, to those who for months built the inspiring campaign that led to the precedent-setting decision by the University of Johannesburg to sever ties with Ben Gurion University over the latter's complicity in human rights violations.

This decision by the University of Johannesburg is certainly a watershed moment for the academic and cultural boycott. The sustained campaign of education and outreach undertaken by activists and engaged academics in South Africa (with resolute support from colleagues in Palestine and globally) is a remarkable model that should be developed and deployed in BDS campaigns the world over. [1] It is also of extreme symbolic significance for all those involved in the anti-apartheid struggle (past and present) that a South African university is the first to sever ties with an Israeli academic institution, underlining the message that apartheid is wrong *anywhere*.

This victory comes on the heels of the most successful Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) to date. [2] This year more than 100 cities participated in the seventh annual IAW. This is a very significant increase from the 55 cities that hosted the week last year, and a remarkable achievement considering it started seven years ago on one university campus in Toronto, organized by a handful of students, mostly Palestinian refugees in the diaspora.

IAW activities vary from one city to the next, including academic lectures, cultural festivals, and BDS actions that raise awareness about the apartheid dimension of Israel's multi-tiered regime of oppression against the Palestinian people and promote the BDS campaign. While IAW has been consistently growing across North America, this year it spread further in Europe, Australia, Latin America and significantly in Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. IAW 2011 happened in the wake of the inspiring popular uprisings across the Arab world, making it very important to add the efforts of IAW to the multitude of youth voices calling for justice, freedom and self determination across the Arab region and beyond. In close cooperation with many international partners, PACBI members participated as guest speakers in IAW events across the globe and supported divestment campaigns and motions on various campuses.

The spread and continued success of IAW, despite Zionist efforts to undermine it, clearly show that the BDS movement is not only growing and gaining momentum, but also that after years of building an understanding of the institutional academic and cultural boycott, university students, often supported by progressive faculty, are beginning to take action in the form of divestment campaigns and challenging specific academic links between their universities and Israeli academic institutions, all of which are deeply complicit in Israel's occupation and apartheid.

For example, in Toronto, the entire week of IAW events, including guest lectures from Judith Butler, Ali Abunimah, Judy Rebick and Riham Barghouti, focused on the complicity of western academic institutions in supporting and sustaining Israeli apartheid. Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) officially launched a divestment campaign, joining with the existing divestment campaign at Carleton University in Ottawa. The students opened the week with demands for the University of Toronto and York University (Toronto) officially to divest from four companies involved in violations of Palestinian human rights. [3]

In Edinburgh, Israeli Apartheid Week lectures were followed by the passing of a motion to boycott Israel at the Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA) General Meeting on Monday, 14th March. The motion was passed with an overwhelming majority, with 270 votes in favour and 20 against. It called for a boycott of Israeli goods in EUSA shops and supply chains. [5]

IAW in the Arab world was also a success, and with the recent wave of democratic revolutions, it looks even more promising for the years to come, as Israel loses more of its tyrannical friends in the region. Quite significantly, Gaza weathered the illegal siege to hold its *second* IAW. Exceptionally determined students and faculty there found creative ways to use technology and hold Skype events to bring speakers from around the world, and to build linkages between Palestinians and the international solidarity movements. Jordan and Lebanon also held impressive events. In Jordan, where there is an official “peace” with Israel, activists had to brave the secret police to ensure events would take place. They are at the forefront of redeveloping and renewing a consistent and effective discourse of boycott and normalization, and we encourage others in the Arab world to work with them and build on the momentum of this month.

It is also worth noting that Palestinian and anti-colonial Jewish-Israeli student activists held IAW events in Jaffa, Haifa, Nazareth and Jerusalem.

The success of IAW in promoting the analysis of Israel as a state practicing apartheid, among other violations of international law, and spreading the BDS movement can be partially gauged by the hysterical and unprecedented Zionist response to the week. This year, there was a concerted and well-funded effort, led by the Israeli establishment and its main lobby groups, to counter the week, with Israeli universities recruited to play a significant role in these attempts. For example, Ben Gurion University

and the Weizmann Institute joined forces with Israel’s Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs to support and finance a delegation of Israelis going to the UK to counter IAW. It is not surprising with the tight connections between Israeli academic institutions and the Israeli state that the universities would help launch this effort.[6] The ‘tour’ of Israeli students so far in the UK has been an abysmal failure; students are simply rejecting - and often ridiculing - the main propaganda message that Israel is a multicultural haven. The tour has been met with protests or empty rooms. A similar effort was launched in North America as well but was also unable to generate any interest from the general student body, while IAW speakers consistently spoke to overcrowded rooms.

There is a crisis in the Zionist camp on how to react to the diverse, creative and strategic student activism in the BDS movement and how to react to the recent spread of the academic and cultural boycott, specifically. They shift from hard to soft tactics, on one hand using smear campaigns and legal repression to shut down Israeli Apartheid Week activities in some places [7], in others trying to desperately rebrand Israel as a friendly place for students. Yet they do not seem to galvanize any excitement, let alone respect, even within their own ranks. On the other hand, Israeli Apartheid Week’s reach continues to grow and inspire students. Israel and its key pressure groups, addicted to the singularly arrogant and ultimately futile tactics of intimidation and intellectual terror, fail to see what many around the world are starting to clearly articulate: there is no way to rebrand or beautify apartheid, ethnic cleansing, medieval siege or military occupation.

PACBI warmly welcomes the successes of this week and salutes our allies around the world, especially in the birthplace of IAW in Canada, for their principled positions and actions, and for standing in solidarity with Palestinians struggling for their inalienable, UN-sanctioned rights. Finally, we look forward to working with solidarity movements around the world to build on the achievements of IAW over the next year and to forge new and strong relationships as we struggle together to end Israeli occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid. PACBI

Notes:

[1] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1523>

[2] www.apartheidweek.org

[3] Full details on the campaign and promotional materials here:

<http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/799>

[4] Quoted in

<http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/598099>

[5] <http://sjp.eusa.ed.ac.uk/2011/03/press-release-160311-edinburgh-university-students-vote-overwhelmingly-for-boycott-of-israeli-goods/>

[6]

<http://www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/to-pics/economy-of-the-occupation/3347-israeli-government-universities-support-student-delegation-sent-to-fight-israel-apartheid-week->

[7] As with the cancellation of an IAW event in New York City at the LGBT Centre, details here:

<http://adalahny.org/press-releases-other/action-alert-sign-the-petition-iaw-in-nyc-on-the-cancelation-of-our-event-at-the-lgbt-center>

Censorship at the Ecole Normale Supérieure

In mid-March a petition was drafted in support of free speech at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. It rapidly gained 160 signatures of remarkable distinction drawn entirely from academics in the United States, Canada and the UK. Those signing include the distinguished historian of France Natalie Zemon Davis, philosopher Judith Butler, physicist Freeman Dyson, as well as historians Marina Warner and Joan W. Scott, and mathematicians David Mumford, and Graeme Segal. Not to mention Noam Chomsky. This is by no means a list of the usual suspects. From Oxford alone there are full professors from 4 widely different disciplines. The letter itself became the subject of a news item in the Guardian [Ban on Israel-Palestine debate ignites free speech row at French university](#). The full letter, with signatures, can be found at <https://sites.google.com/site/academicfreedomns/> where signatures can still be added. The Press release about the delivery of the petition can be found at <http://www.epacbi.eu/articles/160-scholars-protest-censorship-ecole-normale-superieure-france.html>

Why the fuss?

The Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris is perhaps the grandest of France's 'Grandes Écoles'. Founded in 1794 it has long been a national legend. Its alumni have included, for instance, Henri Bergson, Michel Foucault, Louis

Pasteur, Jean-Paul Sartre; all 10 French winners of the Fields Medal; and all 10 French Nobel Laureates. According to THES it ranks first not just among French higher education institutions, but across the whole of continental Europe.

So what has been happening there in recent months is not just a little local affair. A group of students and lecturers formed themselves into the Colléctif Palestine ENS, in order to organise events highlighting the situation in Palestine. A meeting was planned at ENS for January 18th, at which Stéphane Hessel was to take part in a debate on the criminalisation of supporters of the boycott of Israel in France. However the ENS Director, Monique Canto-Sperber, refused the Collectif permission to hold it. It was Hessel's involvement, or rather exclusion, that propelled her action into a major public issue. A protest meeting was held in front of the Pantheon, with an attendance of 1500.

Hessel is 93. In October last year his essay *Indignez-Vous!* (Time for Outrage) was published. *Indignez-Vous!* criticises France's treatment of illegal immigrants, the influence on the media by the rich, cuts to the social welfare system, French educational reforms and, most strongly, Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Initially published with a print-run of 6000, it has now sold over 1.5 million in France, with translations into many other European languages.

This is far from his only claim, not just to fame but also to respect. He served in the French Army during the Battle of France, became a prisoner of war, escaped and joined De Gaulle in London, parachuted into France, was captured, tortured by the Gestapo, escaped while being transferred between Buchenwald and Bergen concentration camps... And of course before all this he had been a student at Ecole Normale Supérieure. After all this he participated in the drafting of the International Declaration of Human Rights, and had a distinguished career as a diplomat.

An ultra-Zionist French website, Des Infos, praised Canto-Sperber for her "intellectual courage" in canceling the debate. (Courage? In canceling free speech?) The Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France

(CRIF) pitched in, as did sundry pro-Israel intellectuals, but also the Minister of Higher Education. The administrations at other colleges buckled under the pressure and refused to let the debate be re-located to their campuses.

Understandably this act of political censorship caused a great furore. Thousands of people signed petitions demanding that Hessel be permitted to speak, and thousands more bought and read his book.

More was to follow. In February the Colléctif Palestine ENS announced its intention of holding events during Israel Apartheid Week at the beginning of March, and in particular a meeting to be addressed by Omar Barghouti of PACBI and the Israeli film-maker Eyal Sivan. The theme of all these meetings was to be an investigation of whether it was appropriate to refer to the Israeli-Palestinian situation as Apartheid. But Canto-Sperber stepped up to the plate once more, and again refused permission. The Collectif went to the Administrative Court, which on February 26th ruled in their favour, saying the Director did not have the right to prevent the meeting! ENS appealed to the Conseil d'Etat (the highest administrative court in France) which over-ruled that decision. The Barghouti/Sivan meeting was held, but elsewhere.

The international petition about suppression of free speech at ENS is in the form of a letter to Canto-Sperber. It accuses the Director of betraying the historical role of the ENS, as it is described on the school's website: "For decades, the ENS has been the most prestigious site of French intellectual and scientific life. It participated in all the great intellectual debates of modern France, from the Dreyfus Affair to the movements of the 1930's, and from the foundation of the human sciences to the avant-garde movements of the 1970's." One of the organizers of the letter campaign, Princeton Institute for Advanced Study professor of social science Joan Scott, commented that the group was "dismayed by the clear violation of freedom of speech and assembly that occurred."

The Collectif is in the process of bringing the Director's actions (and others in her high-handed management reign) before both the European Court of Human Rights, and the UN Human Rights Council.

Jonathan Rosenhead

The Israeli Government moves to obstruct BDS and criticism.

The antiboycott bill has passed its first reading in the Knesset with 32 votes for and 12 against. 52 Israeli organisations have demanded that the legislative process be stopped, but there is a clear majority in parliament for its continued legislation. The following English version of the relevant press article (see the link <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/bill-to-punish-anti-israel-boycotters-passes-first-knesset-hurdle-1.347734>) differs from the Hebrew original and appears to be inaccurate in that it still cites articles relating to foreign individuals and governments that were struck out during negotiations prior to the vote. Nonetheless, the prohibition on promotion of boycott continues to apply both to the boycott of Israel proper and of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, severely curtailing the ability of Israelis to protest. For the current version of the bill and an explanation of its substance see <http://www.jnews.org.uk/news/israeli-anti-boycott-bill-approved-for-vote-by-knesset-plenary>

Source: JNews

Meanwhile the IDF is reported to have created a special department to monitor foreign left-wing groups that they see as aiming to delegitimize Israel. It is reported that there have been discussions concerning the preparation for the possible arrival of another Gaza-bound flotilla in May. Some Foreign Ministry officials are reported to have said "We ourselves don't know exactly how to define delegitimization... this is a very abstract definition. Are flotillas to Gaza delegitimization? Is criticism of settlements delegitimization?" The new Military Intelligence unit will monitor Western groups involved in boycotting Israel, divesting from it or imposing sanctions on it. The unit will also collect information about groups that attempt to bring war crime or other charges against high-ranking Israeli officials, and will examine possible links between such organizations and terror groups.

Source: Ha'aretz . March 21.2011

Boycott 'victory' as music festival distances itself from Israel

This headline, posted on the online Jewish Chronicle on March 24, says it all.

<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/47052/boycotters-victory-music-festival-distances-itself-israel>

A BRICUP statement on March 8 challenging official Israeli support for a conference titled “Art Musics of Israel: Identities, Ideologies, Influences,” sent the organisers rushing to deny any such sponsorship.

The conference, organised by the Jewish Music Institute’s Forum for Israeli Music, was scheduled to take place at venues in and around London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) on March 28-31. Support from the Israeli Embassy in London and, via a partnership with the British Council, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Culture and Sport in Israel, was prominently displayed on its publicity.

Within hours of BRICUP’s statement going public, SOAS head of music Abigail Wood telephoned to insist there was no funding from these sources.

In often contradictory email and phone exchanges with campaigners, plus statements to the Jewish Chronicle, JMI director Geraldine Auerbach said that an offer of £1,500 funding from the British Council BI ARTS initiative had not been taken up because “it’s not worth the hassle from people like you”; that “the offending items” would be removed from publicity materials; and that the Israeli Embassy was promoting the conference (Auerbach interview in Jewish Chronicle), but had not actually done so (Auerbach email to BRICUP).

The logos of official Israeli sources of support did duly disappear from the web publicity. In consultation with the Student Union at SOAS, BRICUP, working with Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods (J-BIG) and the Boycott Israel Network’s (BIN) cultural boycott group, announced that the conference was no longer a priority for boycott.

This was not an easy decision to take as, regardless of funding issues, the conference clearly fell into the category of “cultural institutions, projects and events that continue to serve the purposes of the Israeli colonial and apartheid regime” (PACBI - Palestinian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel – www.pacbi.org)

As Reem Kelani, Palestinian singer and musician, says in the latest BRICUP statement dated March 24: “It is a stain on SOAS’ stature as an institution of academic excellence to host a conference which seeks to deny the existence of a Palestinian cultural narrative and whose primary purpose is to present a politically shaped Israeli musical history.”

BRICUP’s Prof. Jonathan Rosenhead says: “Clearly the event has been formulated in close contact with the Israeli authorities, so that its programme and structure serve the Brand Israel agenda.”

So what can we learn from the conduct of this campaign and its outcome?

It began in January when, following an approach from BRICUP to SOAS’s Palestine Society, a general meeting of the SOAS Students’ Union (SU) called on the college not to collaborate with the conference – an international academic event attracting top names from the world of musicology. The word “Palestine” did not appear anywhere in the extensive publicity material. Arab music seemed to be considered only as contributing to the development of dominant Israeli musical forms.

As reported in the February BRICUP newsletter, the resolution passed by the SOAS student union stated: “By co-organizing, promoting and providing space to this conference, SOAS is aiding the Brand Israel campaign, facilitating the normalization of Israel’s image. In doing so SOAS helps Israel disguise its institutional racism against Palestinian citizens of Israel and its illegal military occupation of the Occupied Territories.”

The motion said: “SOAS has no place participating in or facilitating a conference that is affiliated with official Israeli state institutions.” It called on Paul Webley, Director of SOAS, to cancel his planned opening address and not collaborate in this event

BRICUP, J-BIG and the BIN culture group gathered 25 signatures from notable figures from a variety of music disciplines calling on participants in the conference to reconsider their position.

A separate letter was drafted telling conference participants that the event fell into “a category which has been targeted for boycott by organisations representing the overwhelming majority of Palestine’s civil society.”

Both letters were held in readiness awaiting the conference organisers’ response to BRICUP’s March 8 statement. Like the SU resolution, this put most stress on Israeli state funding as the main source of objection. When Auerbach gave assurances that there was no such funding, the

student body dropped their demands on SOAS to withdraw cooperation from the conference.

The BRICUP view is that there was a good case for continuing the boycott, with further press releases, direct calls to participants to withdraw, and the possibility of interventions during the conference. However in deference to the SU position we agreed to call off further action. This experience suggests there is a challenge to BDS campaigners to ensure that a wider interpretation of PACBI guidelines becomes common ground, in order to prevent such events from pursuing Israel's normalisation agenda.

There can be no doubt that within those limits this was an extremely effective campaign, leaving the organisers scrambling to retreat from their exposed position and anxious to remove all signs of Israeli official patronage (and possibly the reality of that patronage as well). It has put down a clear warning marker for organisers of possible Brand Israel initiatives in the future. Link to March 24 statement: http://www.bricup.org.uk/documents/cultural/SOAS_music.pdf

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

Roger Waters supports the boycott of Israel

The former Pink Floyd frontman Roger Waters performed in Israel in 2005, ignoring calls from Palestinian rights advocates to cancel. But while in Israel, he visited Jerusalem and Bethlehem and was taken to the separation wall which he called "an appalling edifice to behold." Waters said he was extremely affected by his tour of the West Bank, scrawling "We don't need no thought control" on the wall, and cancelling his performance in Tel Aviv. Instead, the British star held the concert in Neve Shalom, a cooperative village founded by Jews and Arabs.

In a statement, Waters wrote announcing his support of a cultural boycott of Israel, he said that "in his view, the abhorrent and draconian control that Israel wields over the besieged Palestinians in Gaza, and the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, coupled with its denial of the rights of refugees to return to their homes in Israel, demands that fair minded people around the world support the Palestinians in their civil, nonviolent resistance." He concluded by saying that he is joining the campaign of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)

against Israel, until Israel satisfies the basic human rights that are demanded by international law, namely: to end the occupation of the West Bank: to dismantle the separation wall: to recognize the rights of Arab citizens of Israel and grant them full equality; and to allow all Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

Waters stressed in his letter that he is not anti-Semitic, and his solidarity with the Palestinians stems from his belief that all people deserve basic human rights.

Source: Ha'aretz

Two open letters to performers

To the Coen brothers

Dear Joel and Ethan Coen:

We understand that you're among this year's winners of a \$1mn Dan David prize, awarded jointly by the Dan David Foundation and Tel Aviv University. We read that you're likely to attend the award ceremony in Israel on May 15, in the company of Israeli president Shimon Peres.

All this may seem unexceptional to you. But we think you're too smart not to understand that nothing in this situation is simple. The Dan David judges apparently like your ability 'to tell a simple story in a complex manner'. Allow us to complicate your reported acceptance of this prize.

Your much-celebrated presence will adorn a colonial settler state still vigorously engaged in the business of dispossessing and driving out the indigenous inhabitants, who are the Palestinians. Of course the United States itself is built on the bones and demolished civilizations of its own indigenous inhabitants, but for the Palestinians the struggle is real and present – an every day battle to hang on to land, houses, livelihoods, hopes and ambitions.

Your appearance in Israel will unfortunately help camouflage the brutal realities of a powerful and illegal military occupation. However much you believe you can go there simply as artists, your presence will be spun to reassure the Israeli public that their ruthless colonial society is 'normal', and to promote Brand Israel abroad. You will be saying, to Israelis and to the world, that Israel's violently

racist treatment of the Palestinians is acceptable.
Do you really want to do this?

Palestinian civil society organisations, grouped together as [PACBI](#), are asking international artists not to go to Israel while it flouts international law and denies Palestinian rights. In the last few weeks, musicians Roger Waters and Pete Seeger have announced their support for this boycott call; they join film directors Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, writers John Berger and Arundhati Roy, musicians Massive Attack, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott-Heron, The Pixies, and many others.

You may reject the idea of ‘taking a stand’ like this; you may feel it’s antithetical to the whole spirit and ethos of your writing and film-making. But by accepting the prize and going to Israel, you are already taking a stand.

Boycott is a non-violent form of direct action. It gives citizens the power to act in favour of justice when our governments fail to do so. Is it conceivable that during the long struggle against apartheid South Africa, you would have travelled there to receive an award from an apartheid institution? If it isn’t, you’re already willing to boycott an unjust system.

Right now a group of Israelis organising as [Boycott! Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within](#) are threatened with legal sanctions by an anti-boycott bill that has just passed its first reading in the Israeli parliament. You could maybe stand with them. Or with [these Palestinian children](#), woken from sleep by an Israeli army unit and photographed because, apparently, they represent a threat to the state. Or with 11 year old Kareem Tamimi, arrested in January in the chilling circumstances of [this video](#).

But if you go to Tel Aviv and accept the prize, you’ll be standing with Shimon Peres, *capo dei capi* of the security forces whose activities one gets a glimpse of in these clips. Won’t it make you queasy to do so? We think it ought to. Please don’t go.

On behalf of BRICUP,

Yours sincerely, Professor Haim Bresheeth

Mike Cushman

Professor Jonathan Rosenhead

To Sir Bob Geldof

Dear Sir Bob,

I understand from a report in the Jewish Chronicle (21 March 2011) that you are accepting an honorary degree from Ben Gurion University in Israel in May.

Your name is associated with campaigns to make the world – particularly the non-Western world – a better place. But Israel – adopting nineteenth century European colonial attitudes of civilizational superiority over ‘Asian barbarism’ – was founded on the dispossession of the Palestinians. Since 1948, Israel has been justifiably censured in more UN resolutions than any other state.

Ben Gurion University, where you will accept your not-so-honorable degree, is not a progressive force in an Israel that has otherwise lost its way. Instead, this academic institution is heavily implicated in ongoing violations of international law and human rights, and the world’s longest-running military occupation.

During the widely-condemned Operation Cast Lead (Dec 2008-Jan 2009), the Israeli army (the IDF) massacred with state-of-the-art weapons more than a thousand largely defenceless Palestinians, most of them civilians already living under a cruel siege in the world’s largest open air prison (Gaza). The impeccable Judge Goldstone found, under the auspices of the UN, that Israel should be investigated for war crimes. But Ben Gurion University actually outdid other Israeli universities in its support for the soldiers who helped carry out these atrocities. Ben Gurion gave a special grant of NIS 180 (around 35 Euros) per day, to students who did reserve duty during the slaughter.

This should be no surprise, given that although Ben Gurion was not given the tender, it claimed to have originated the idea in 2008 of a school for military medicine, designed specifically to train medical staff for the Israeli armed forces. Indeed, Ben Gurion complained when the tender was awarded to the Hebrew University. It has also been the case for some time that Ben Gurion, like other Israeli universities, routinely offers special privileges to the Israeli military. For example, as part of their training, military pilots receive a BA from Ben Gurion University in the course of a single year (instead of the normal three years).

And whereas it is hard to imagine the work of Sir Bob Geldof without thinking of the importance of the freedom to engage in political activism, Ben Gurion University has played its part in stifling

dissent on campus at crucial moments. While the world demonstrated in horror at the massacre in Gaza, Ben Gurion's security guards were busy photographing and monitoring political activists, and put in place unreasonable obstacles to activism, even preventing students from mounting legal political demonstrations and activities.

I write in the hope that facts such as these will appeal to your conscience and you will change your mind about accepting this degree from an institution that is materially and ideologically complicit in occupation, siege, and massacre. Your acceptance will be treated as a propaganda victory by those shrill voices who seek neither justice nor peace in Israel and Palestine.

Thank you very much for your attention.

John T. Chalcraft
On behalf of BRICUP,

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are 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

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