BRICUP Newsletter 43

BRICUP

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine August 2011

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July 8th Fly-in: 'Welcome to Palestine' but not to Israel.

Academics such as Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein have been barred from entering Israel to give talks hosted by Palestinians. More generally, Palestinians have been effectively barred from receiving foreign visitors unless they pretend to be tourists who will remain within 1948 Israel.

The 'Welcome to Palestine' initiative aimed to challenge this general blockade. The initiative was organised by the Palestine Justice Network, bringing together numerous civil society and human rights organisations there. It was announced long in advance on the PJN website: coming from all over Europe, several hundred visitors planned to declare their true intentions when arriving at passport control at Ben Gurion airport on 8th July.

On the day, approx. 350 were barred from boarding their flights from several European airports, and 120 others were detained in prison until sent back home (including BRICUP members Les Levidow and John Lynes). Mass media gave high-profile coverage to the 'fly-in': European visitors were imprisoned by Israel, and a Bethlehem demonstration demanded their release. This wide exposure achieved the main aim – to publicise and challenge Israel's blockade on solidarity visitors to Palestine. Read more details.

As an extra twist, Israeli authorities tried to demonise the European visitors as hooligans. Border Police schemed to stigmatise the Arab-origin European prisoners as terrorists. Les Levidow has written a first-hand account, available in four languages, which can be circulated to colleagues in other countries.

in English: <u>Demonising the Fly-in: Israel's strategy</u> in action

en français: <u>Fly-in "Bienvenue</u> <u>Palestine": Tentatives de l'Etat israélien pour</u> diaboliser les militants européens

in italiano: <u>Demonizzazione del "fly-in": la strategia</u> israeliana in azione

auf Deutsche: <u>Die Dämonisierung des Fly-in: In</u> Palästina willkommen, in Israel nicht

Les Levidow

The PACBI Column

Israel's Anti-BDS Law: Proving the Effectiveness of the Boycott

This last month has seen the Israeli government reach an unprecedented level of desperation in its attempt to counter the spread of international solidarity with Palestinian rights. Early in the month, Israel employed the embattled Greek government to act as a proxy force to stop the Gazabound flotilla before it could even take off into international waters. Israel also outsourced its repression against human rights activists to some western states, especially France, which colluded in thwarting the planned fly-in of hundreds of solidarity activists. Finally, there was the new anti-BDS law, another seemingly futile attempt to counter the growing boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement which Israel views as a "strategic threat" to its system of occupation, colonialism and apartheid.

The fact that the BDS movement is today the main international challenge to Israel's impunity and exceptional status as a state above the law, and that it has effectively exposed international state and non-state complicity in maintaining Israel's multitiered system of oppression has made the movement the target of Israel's rage. On 11 July, the Israeli parliament passed a law that would ban support for BDS as well as for partial boycotts targeting Israel or any of its complicit institutions. This recently

passed draconian anti-BDS law deems it a civil wrong to call for a boycott of the State of Israel and any area under its control [1]. Under this law, boycott advocates may be subjected to significant financial penalties without the plaintiffs, whether individuals or institutions, having to prove that the call for boycott in question resulted in any real damages.

We in the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) strongly condemn this anti-BDS law as the latest indicator of Israel's decades-old repression and apartheid policies. We firmly stand in solidarity with our principled Israeli partners, such as the Coalition of Women for Peace, Boycott from Within, Alternative Information Center, and Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions, who may, as a result of this law, face punitive measures for supporting the Palestinian-led BDS campaign.

Far from being deterred by such cynical attempts to instill fear in the movement, we shall carry on and intensify our civil resistance to Israeli apartheid and colonial oppression with unprecedented resolve and determination. We see the passing of the anti-BDS law as a clear sign of the irrefutable effectiveness of the BDS movement, both internationally and within Israel, and of the failure of Israel's other potent weapons, such as intimidation, bullying and smear campaigns, to counter the movement. The BDS movement's slogan, "Freedom, Justice, Equality," its creative and de-centralized global tactics, the Palestinian consensus around it, and its foundation in respect for international law and universal human rights, have all made BDS a formidable strategy of resistance that has rendered much of Israel's might, with all its nuclear weapons, largely ineffective.

The anti-BDS law is first and foremost an attack on the rights of Palestinians and meant as a repressively blunt measure against Palestinian nonviolent resistance and effective solidarity with it. It prevents all Israeli citizens and permanent residents, regardless of background, which is an ironic exception in a state with apartheid laws, from standing in solidarity with Palestinians, whether in the occupied Palestinian territories, in Israel, or in the diaspora. While clearly eroding whatever free speech Jewish Israelis once had, the primary and ultimate targets of this law, then, are not Jewish Israelis, who have the privilege to not engage in boycotts and resistance if they so choose, but Palestinians, who must resist to exist in the face of Israeli occupation, colonialism and apartheid.

PACBI is troubled, therefore, by biased media representations of the impact of this law as merely infringing on the rights of Israelis and as eroding the supposed "democratic nature" of the Israeli state. Focusing on the infringement of freedom of speech of Israelis, while ignoring Israel's ongoing grave violations of international law and Palestinian rights, fits well with the typically racist attitude in the Israeli mainstream media towards Palestinians, and fails to consider the reasons for the passing of this law in the first place.

Moreover, a state that is built on apartheid, occupation, ethnic cleansing and denial of basic human rights cannot and should not be considered a democracy by any fair standard. Israel's self-definition as a "Jewish and democratic state" is an obvious oxymoron. Israeli "democracy" has always been a myth since it only applies to Jewish citizens, excluding undesirable "others" – the indigenous Palestinians. In this sense, Israel has always been a "democracy" only for a privileged part of its population, just as apartheid South Africa.

The reason this law has become controversial is precisely because it encroaches on the taken for granted rights of Jewish Israelis. Had this law targeted the Palestinian citizens of Israel alone, as dozens of apartheid laws in Israel actually do, it would have hardly caught media attention, not to mention a dedicated New York Times editorial on the issue [2]. After all, the rights of those Palestinians are violated persistently and systematically through dozens of racist Israeli laws that span marriage, land and nationality, and that are condemned even by the US Department of State which sees them as constituting "institutional, legal, and societal discrimination."[3] With this in mind, all what has been eroded is the façade of democracy enjoyed by Israeli Jewish citizens. And if the Israeli courts decide to nullify this law it would only be for the purpose of protecting this fraudulent façade and maintaining the overall system of oppression and racial discrimination.

Perhaps this anti-BDS law will show many Israelis that under circumstances of occupation and apartheid, to co-exist is to "co-resist" this oppressive system.[4] Perhaps it will help them recognize and motivate them to act to end the profound injustices and utter lack of freedoms Palestinians have been subjected to for 63 years, and in doing so, to broaden their scope of boycotts and demand more than just an end to the occupation, but also equal rights for all and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Only

then can comprehensive and sustainable peace be reached, on a solid foundation of freedom, justice and equality.

Notes:

[1]

http://jewssansfrontieres.blogspot.com/2011/07/israe ls-anti-boycott-law-q.html See also link from this page to The Association for Civil Rights in Israel

[2]

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/18/opinion/18mon 2.html?_r=1

[3]

http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/15446 3.htm

[4]

http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID =405314&utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=t witter

Open letters to Renee Fleming

1] From BRICUP dated 5 july 2011

Dear Renee Fleming:

We understand you're singing a concert of 'duets and arias' in Jerusalem on July 28 with the Israel Philharmonic and their director, Zubin Mehta - a concert that will be simultaneously broadcast to 480 cinemas across the USA under the title 'Live from Jerusalem'.

We're writing to ask you urgently to reconsider your decision to do this. Even at this late stage, you have it within your power to act in sympathy with people who won't be able to attend your concert, because they are Palestinian. Two-thirds of the population was ethnically cleansed in 1947/8, and has never been allowed to return; millions more endure illegal occupation and siege by the Israeli army. When maestro Mehta raises his baton, none of these people will be in the audience - the Israeli authorities won't allow them into Jerusalem, let alone your concert at the Sultan's Pool. 'Live from Jerusalem' indeed - more like a wake -except the Palestinians are not yet defeated. 'This land promises wheat and stars', said

the poet Mahmoud Darwish. We are its salt and its water. We are its wound, but a wound that fights.'

From what we read about your concert, we think it's using your fame and popularity in the USA to conduct propaganda for Israel. Do you really want to do this? Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations-sponsored Goldstone Commission, have all published a great deal of evidence to support charges of war crimes against the Israeli government and army who conducted the 2008-9 onslaught on Gaza, against a population that was completely trapped - could not escape, by land or sea. They were like turkeys in a barrel, and the Israeli army and airforce slaughtered them. You may think you are simply turning up in Jerusalem to share your glorious voice with music lovers, but since Zubin Mehta himself describes the Israel Philharmonic as 'Israel's flagship', your performance will be spun as a declaration of support for Israel and the actions of its governments. Do you want to lend your stamp of approval to war crimes?

Renee Fleming, whether you want to be or not, you have become the operatic voice of the American people. You sang at the memorial for the 9/11 victims in October 2001; you sang at the inauguration of President Obama. You have an iconic importance that goes beyond the fact of your wonderful voice.

You can choose to use that weight for something brave -you can withdraw from the Jerusalem concert. You can say that you do not wish to appear to endorse Israel's cruel treatment of the Palestinians. If you do this, you will be in tune with a growing number of Americans who support an academic and cultural boycott of Israel as long as Israel denies Palestinian rights -they include Adrienne Rich, Barbara Ehrenreich and Judith Butler).

Your countrywoman, Alice Walker, is even now on a ship called The Audacity of Hope, attempting to break the siege of Gaza. She says she is doing so because of 'the children of Palestine, who were ignored in our president's latest speech on Israel and Palestine, and whose impoverished, terrorized, segregated existence was mocked by the standing ovations recently given in the US Congress to the prime minister of Israel'. You can see her speak in the funny short film, Gaza Island (it also stars your colleague, Kiri te Kanawa).

In November last year, Cape Town Opera rejected appeals from all over the world, including from former archbishop Desmond Tutu, to cancel its tour of Israel. We thought you'd like to watch the <u>flash mob</u> put on outside its performance of 'Porgy and Bess' by Israeli supporters of the Palestinian call for boycott. 'Palestine', they sang, 'and the living ain't easy...'.

You are an adventurous artist, Renee Fleming, and we think a person of conscience. 'Boycott apartheid-it's time to tell Israel NO!', the flashmobbers sang. We hope you'll hear them. Please don't sing in Jerusalem.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of BRICUP

Professor Haim Bresheeth

Mike Cushman

Dr Ghada Karmi

Professor Adah Kay

Professor Jonathan Rosenhead

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2] From Anat Matar dated July 6th 2011

Dear Renee Fleming, I'm writing to you as a Jewish Israeli citizen, an anti-occupation activist, but also as a fan. Your voice has been accompanying me in good and bad moments for years, bringing joy but also soothing. This is why it saddened me a lot to read of your decision to sing in Jerusalem, in a concert that will no doubt celebrate Israel as a beacon of culture and art. Cultural events are cynically used by the Israeli Foreign ministry as PR events, whose main target is to draw international attention away from Israel's 44 years of brutal occupation of Palestinian land and from its criminal behaviour towards the Palestinian people throughout these years. At the beginning of 2001, just a few months after the second Palestinian uprising had started, soprano singer Emma Kirkby decided to cancel her performances in Jerusalem in the last minute. In a letter she wrote at the time, she explained her decision thus: "I'm very sorry. There's no easy way to put this. I cannot come this week. I made myself all ready to leave this morning, but in truth I have been unable to countenance this for a long while. It's been like a stone hanging over me and I can't stand under that stone and sing for joy in a place where people are blockaded in their villages and the safety of one group of innocent people is maintained by the oppression of

another... I have wonderful memories of audiences in Israel. I have respect and sympathy for my Israeli musical colleagues, and for those reasons I swallowed my initial misgivings and said I would come - but I find in my gut that I can't..."

http://www.lworldcommunication.org/emmakirby.htm

At the time, I wrote Ms Kirkby and let her know of my support of her brave and conscientious desicion. She replied that voices like mine - of Israeli Jews - were important for her; she was encouraged and reassured by them. It is for this reason that I dare take your time and write to you. I do hope you'll follow Kirkby's example and let your voice remain as pure as it is now. Yours, with admiration,

The BBC includes the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in its 'Proms' programme.

The Palestinian response to the BBC was:-

Out of tune with human rights

Anat Matar

Ramat Hasharon, Israel

We, Palestinian cultural institutions, including the leading musical organizations, urge the BBC to cancel the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) concert at this year's Proms [1], due to IPO's complicity in whitewashing Israel 's persistent violations of international law and human rights. The IPO is scheduled to perform in September in London . Should the BBC fail to cancel this ill-conceived concert, we urge all people of conscience in the UK and especially those who stand for justice, freedom, equality and human rights to effectively protest this event, including by promoting a wide boycott of it, and by tapping into the impressive creative energies British supporters of Palestinian rights have always shown.

The IPO is one of the flagship institutions of the Israeli state, tracing its history to the 1930's under the British Mandate. The IPO Foundation describes the orchestra as "Israel's musical ambassador," [2] while the American Friends of the IPO has this to say about it:

Often said to have more heart than other orchestras, the IPO is Israel 's finest cultural emissary and travels throughout the world, particularly to countries where there is little or no Israeli representation. In some cases, performances of the

IPO are the only example of Israel 's existence. The goodwill created by these tours, which have included historic visits to Japan, Argentina, Poland, Hungary, Russia, China and India, is of enormous value to the State of Israel. As a result, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra maintains its position at the forefront of cultural diplomacy and the international music scene. [3]

As befits an institution that identifies with the Israeli state and openly serves Israel 's interests, despite its occupation and apartheid and decades-old denial of Palestinian rights, the IPO proudly announces its partnership with the army under a scheme whereby special concerts for Israeli soldiers are organized at their army outposts [4].

In this way, the orchestra has lent itself to the official Israeli propaganda campaign titled Brand Israel, which aims to divert attention from Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights to its artistic and scientific achievements. [5]

Moreover, during the 1948 Nakba, the IPO made it a mission to entertain Israeli soldiers [6] who were busy ethnically cleansing Palestinians, committing massacres and systematically demolishing hundreds of Palestinian villages to prevent the refugees' return. The IPO also entertained Israeli troops in 1967 [7], right after Israel's war of aggression against the Palestinians and Arab states and its occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula.

Given the orchestra's strong association with the Israeli state and other Zionist organizations involved in "brand-Israel" activities [8], we call upon all Palestine solidarity activists in the United Kingdom to organize activities to protest and boycott the orchestra's concerts. As long as it continues to partner with the state in whitewashing war crimes and international law violations, the Israeli cultural establishment cannot expect to be exempted from the growing boycott movement.

This appeal is made within the framework of the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) [9], and the call for the boycott of all Israeli academic and cultural institutions issued by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) [10], and in accordance with the guidelines for the cultural boycott of Israel [11], which an

overwhelming majority of Palestinian cultural and artistic institutions have endorsed.

We believe that the time has come to apply pressure on Israel in the form of boycotts, divestment initiatives and sanctions, as was done successfully in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa . Israel must not be allowed to flout international law and precepts of international humanitarian law with impunity. Israel 's cultural ambassadors play a pivotal role in covering up Israel 's crimes against the Palestinian people; they must be held accountable for their shameless complicity.

Signed:

- Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
- General Union for Palestinian Writers
- Edward Said National Conservatory of Music
- Al Kamandjati Association
- The Palestinian House of Poetry
- Yabous Cultural Center, Jerusalem
- Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Centre
- The Popular Art Centre
- The Palestinian Forum for Culture and Media Paris
- Sanabel Theater Jerusalem
- Theatre Day Productions
- World Association of Writers Palestine center
- Al-Harah Theater
- Palestinian Association for Contemporary Art (PACA)
- Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinemateque

- [1] http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/whats-on/2011/september-01/73
- [2] http://www.ipo.co.il/eng/Fund/AboutUs/Articles, 58.aspx
- [3] http://www.afipo.org/ipo; emphasis added.
- [4] http://www.ipo.co.il/eng/About/Profile/.aspx
- [5] For more on the Brand Israel campaign, see:

http://www.forward.com/articles/2070

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html

http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/about-face-

1.170267?trailingPath=2.169%2C2.225%2C2.239%

2C

- [6] http://www.ask.com/wiki/Music_of_Israel
- [7] http://www.jewishideasdaily.com/content/module/2010/12/24/main-feature/1/the-sound-of-classical-music
- [8] One such organization is the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, whose mission includes "[d]epict[ing] the State of Israel as a thriving cultural environment that stimulates creativity and artistic life." See http://www.aicf.org/about/mission. The organization takes credit for having supported and promoted all major cultural institutions in Israel , such as the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and the Israel Museum .

See: http://www.aicf.org/about/impact/institutions
[9] http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52
[10] http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869
[11] http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1047

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BRICUP has written an open letter to Roger Wright, Controller BBC Radio 3 and Director BBC Proms, as follows:-

Israel Philharmonic at the Proms

You may already be aware of the call from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel for the invitation to the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra to perform at this year's Proms season to be cancelled. In case you have not, I attach a copy of their Open Letter.

I shall not repeat here the arguments in that letter, signed by an impressive array of Palestinian cultural organisations. They are supported also by British organizations concerned to see justice for Palestinians. Boycott is a non-violent way, requested by Palestinian civil society, to bring the pressure of world civil society to bear on the Israeli public and government. By inviting the IPO, a pillar of the Israeli state system and of its cultural propaganda campaign, you provide the Israeli government, perpetrator of the Cast Lead invasion of Gaza and of so many other violations of international law and of human rights, with the support that they crave.

Cancel the concert!

BRICUP

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At the time of writing, neither PACBI nor BRICUP have received a reply from the BBC. **BRICUP has now issued the following Press Release:-**

"We will picket the Proms": BRICUP calls on 'music-lovers of conscience' to boycott the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

BRICUP, the organisation promoting academic and cultural boycott of Israel within the UK, today called on promenaders to shun the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra when it plays at the Royal Albert Hall on 1st September.

BRICUP was responding to the open letter sent to the Proms organisers on July 18th by PACBI, its Palestinian counterpart. PACBI referred to "the IPO's complicity in whitewashing Israel's persistent violations of international law and human rights", mentioning specifically the IPO's services to the Israeli army dating back to the ethnic cleansing of the Nakba in 1948 and the occupations of 1967, and continuing up to the present day: "the IPO proudly announces its partnership with the army under a scheme whereby special concerts for Israeli soldiers are organized at their army outposts". On behalf of the leading Palestinian musical and cultural organisations, PACBI called on the BBC to withdraw its invitation to the IPO.

BRICUP wrote its own letter to Roger Wright, Director of the Proms, on 31st July, attaching a copy of PACBI's Open Letter for good measure. In it BRICUP's chair, Professor Jonathan Rosenhead, wrote: "By inviting the IPO, a pillar of the Israeli state system and of its cultural propaganda campaign, you provide the Israeli government, perpetrator of the Cast Lead invasion of Gaza and of so many other violations of international law and of human rights, with the support that they crave. Cancel the concert!"

"This is no surprise to anyone who knows what the BBC is like regarding Palestine", said Dr. Sue Blackwell, one of 19 people who pursued an appeal to the BBC Trust concerning bias in the Panorama programme about the Israeli assault on the Mavi Marmara. "The BBC would not even screen the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal for civilians in Gaza who had had their homes and schools bombed in Operation Cast Lead, and they recently bleeped the word 'Palestine' out of a rap performance by Mic Righteous."

"We can only assume they are ignoring us" said BRICUP's Chris Burns-Cox. "They are mistaken if they think we will just go away. We are now calling on all music-lovers of conscience to boycott this Prom, and to call on the BBC to cancel it. We will be picketing and leafleting outside the Royal Albert Hall on 1st September".

Prof. Rosenhead said: "For years now the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been promoting 'Brand Israel', a deliberate PR campaign to divert people's gaze from what they are doing to Palestinians. The idea is to craft a new image by focusing on Israel's

cultural and scientific achievements. This Prom concert by the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra is part of the Brand Israel campaign."

Further notes for editors are available

Indian artists boycott show at Tel Aviv art museum.

Indian artists, who were invited to participate in an exhibition of work at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art next Spring, have signed a public statement refusing the invitation in solidarity with the Palestinian-led call for boycott, divestment and sanctions.

Their statement reads:-

The first major show of Indian art, "Deconstructing India," is planned for Spring 2012 in the new wing of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in Israel.

We, the undersigned artists, who have been invited by the curators to participate in this show, have declined to exhibit our work, in solidarity with the International Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel called by Palestinian intellectuals and artists, and the India Campaign. The Boycott, inspired by the earlier successful international boycott against Apartheid South Africa, is a peaceful, non-violent Gandhian campaign, which is directed at mainstream institutions and not at individuals, to pressurize Israel to recognize the rights of the Palestine people.

The newly built Amir Wing of the Tel Aviv Museum designed by American architect Preston Scott Cohen is planned to be a showpiece for the discredited Israeli Government to increase its status and prestige internationally at a time when the country's image is at its lowest ebb.

By declining to participate in this show, we refuse to legitimize the illegal racist and apartheid policies of the Israeli Government against the people of Palestine and to become a part of "Brand Israel."

Nalini Malani Anita Dube Amar Kanwar Sakshi Gupta Pushpamala N And 22 others... Source: The Electronic Intifada

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

by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at

Sort Code 08-92-99

Account Number 65156591

IBAN = GB20 CPBK 0892 9965 1565 91

BIC = CPBK GB22

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.

More details can be obtained from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

You can follow BRICUP on twitter at

twitter.com/bricup

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