

## Academic freedom and Human Rights at Bar-Ilan University

Bar-Ilan University has been a centre of controversy over the complicity of Israeli Universities in the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank. It was named in the boycott motion passed (and then rescinded) by AUT in 2005, the reason being its role in fostering the establishment of Ariel College in the illegal settlement of that name. (Ariel is now facing the UCU greylisting procedure, as a result of the passing of Motion 25 at this year's UCU Congress.)

Now once again Bar-Ilan is in the spotlight, this time because of suggestions of political bias in its promotion procedures.

Bar-Ilan University is the second largest university in Israel. Its main campus is at Ramat Gan, close to Tel Aviv. To get an idea of how Bar Ilan views itself, one can check the University's own statement on its website – and then compare it with reality. According to the statement, Bar-Ilan regards the sacred principles of Judaism as the manifestation of the Jewish people's uniqueness, and it claims to train scholars, researchers and men of science who are knowledgeable in the Torah and are imbued with the original Jewish spirit and love of one's brethren. The 24,500 students registered at the university hail from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, study together harmoniously in classrooms, laboratories and libraries. Thus, says the University's statement, it contributes to tolerance and coexistence between religious and secular, Arab and Jew. Approximately 88,000 Bar-Ilan University alumni are claimed to hold key positions in Israeli society, infusing the spirit of Jewish values, Jewish morals, intellectual values, ideological moderation and commitment to the community in their respective areas of activity. Bar-Ilan University claims to be a unique

community of scientists who conduct themselves in accordance with the Jewish tradition, investing their energy and efforts into the integration of the old with the new, the ancient with the modern, the sacred with the mundane, the spiritual with the scientific.

Compare this image with reality.

Consult the website of Prof. Efraim Inbar, the director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan

[[http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/efraim\\_inbar/ops.html](http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/efraim_inbar/ops.html)] and you will read the following:-

"Israel has no obligation to the Palestinians if they are indiscriminately killing civilians and damaging valuable infrastructure. International law permits a military response, including artillery, aimed at the sources of fire, even if the fire is coming from urban areas. Israel should not hesitate to create a refugee wave by warning about impending fire on residential areas. Such tactics may result in a degree of Palestinian restraint. Moreover, the international atmosphere is very conducive to an Israeli strike on Hamas-controlled Gaza"

Consider the titles of some of Inbar's papers: 'Cracking down on Gaza now'; 'Rethinking humanitarian aid'; 'Link Ma'ale Adumin to the capital'; 'Stop saying sorry'; 'Getting muscular with Iran'. Inbar is a very influential professor in Gerald Steinberg's Department of Political Science. It was Steinberg who coordinated the Bar-Ilan anti-boycott campaign in 2005. Professor Steinberg is also the executive director of *NGO Monitor* - an Israeli equivalent of Daniel Pipes' *Campus Watch* in the United States, but directed at NGOs. See

<http://www.ngomonitor.org/articles.php?type=about>.

The stated objective of *NGO Monitor* is “to end the practice used by certain self-declared 'humanitarian NGOs' of exploiting the label 'universal human rights values' to promote politically and ideologically motivated anti-Israel agendas”.

Menachem Klein is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Bar-Ilan and the author of ‘Jerusalem: the Contested City’ (2001), amongst numerous other publications. He has published the following account of the political climate at Bar-Ilan:

"Since 2000 many Rightists [i.e. hawks] were promoted to hold key positions in the University. I am well known as an expert on Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but I was never invited to a Bar Ilan conference on these subjects because of my arguments. What I have to say contradicts the [unofficial] University line. In Bar Ilan University there is a centre for Jerusalem studies but I have never been invited to lecture there. The ruling authorities are willing to accept a leftist only if he or she does not express his or her views in public or give TV interviews - one who does not make noise and can not embarrass them. Their problem is that this is not my character. I go public in the field of my academic expertise. The fact that I am an observant Orthodox Jew makes them more nervous." [The weekly magazine ‘G’ of the Israeli Newspaper GLOBES, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008.]

Klein has recently been refused promotion. Since his last promotion, which was in 1998, his impressive list of publications in English include three books, 19 chapters in edited volumes, 6 articles in first class refereed journals, 6 articles in other journals and 9 book reviews. Another 4 papers are accepted for publication. In addition he has participated in more than 70 international conferences and university seminars, mostly outside Israel. His appointments include: a Senior Research Fellowship at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies; External expert adviser to the Minister of Interior Security and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Jerusalem; participant in the Israel-PLO Final Status Talks in 2000; member of the political advisory team operating in the office

of Prime Minister Ehud Barak ; participant of the Geneva Understanding (October 2003); board member of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

*Prima facie*, then, Menachem Klein is the sort of person that most universities would wish to retain and promote. Not promoting someone with his profile could be interpreted as an indirect way of getting an ‘awkward’ staff member to leave. Several leading radical academics have in fact been forced overseas in this and related ways. If Bar-Ilan University wishes to dispel this impression it has a clear recourse - to publish the protocols governing their promotion procedures in general, and Dr Klein's case in particular. Until then, the odour of political bias will cling to them.

Academic freedom is an essential requisite for the evolution of a just resolution of the Palestinian /Israel problem and senior Israeli academics should realize that the eyes of the world are upon them. They are in a position to contribute substantially – or to help prevent a just solution. The UCU call to examine carefully the moral and political implications of educational links with Israeli Institutions is well-timed.

If you have further information about academic conditions at Bar-Ilan please contribute to this discussion.

Glenn Bowman  
David Pegg  
Jonathan Rosenhead

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## **The PACBI Column**

### **On the Academic Freedom Petition by Israeli Academics**

In July 2008, four Israeli academics announced an initiative to secure the endorsement of senior academics at institutions of higher education in Israel on a petition in favor of academic freedom for Palestinian faculty and students. [1] They indicated that after the signatures were gathered,

they intended to seek the support of the Committee of University Presidents and members of the Israeli Academy of Science, and to submit the petition to the ministries of interior, defense, education, science, and foreign affairs. The petition read:

"We, past and present members of academic staff of Israeli universities, express great concern regarding the ongoing deterioration of the system of higher education in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We protest against the policy of our government which is causing restrictions of freedom of movement, study and instruction, and we call upon the government to allow students and lecturers free access to all the campuses in the Territories, and to allow lecturers and students who hold foreign passports to teach and study without being threatened with withdrawal of residence visas. To leave the situation as it is will cause serious harm to freedom of movement, study and instruction – harm to the foundation of academic freedom, to which we are committed."

The initiators of the petition reported that out of about 9000 emails sent to Israeli academics, of which around 5000 went to senior faculty and the rest to emeriti and junior faculty at some of the institutions, they received email endorsements from only 407 individuals.

PACBI is neither surprised by the dismal results of this initiative nor indeed by the content of the petition. We note that the petition ignores the basic political context within which the academic freedom of Palestinian academics and students is being violated. That context is no other than the illegal, four-decades-old military occupation of Palestinian land, an occupation that has striven consistently to destroy Palestinian society and its institutions, including universities and other educational institutions. Forty years of occupation - with whose brutal policies many Israeli academics are personally familiar, if not complicit, through reserve duty - do not figure in the activism of these Israeli academics, do not deserve a note as the only context within which the trampling of Palestinian academic freedom is taking place. A protest effort that fails to even mention the occupation, the root cause of all

denial of Palestinian rights and freedoms, academic freedom included, and that is unwilling to condemn the occupation regime, is simply not acceptable.

We realize that the statement was deliberately bland so as to attract the widest possible endorsement. But sadly, the petition shows that Israeli support for Palestinian human rights is close to nil, even in the "safest" and least "political" of fields: academic freedom. As the background to the petition makes clear, the Israeli academy is not the bastion of dissent it is purported to be by those seeking to delegitimize the call for the academic boycott of Israel. The vast majority of the members of the Israeli academic community is oblivious to the oppression of the Palestinian people - both inside Israel and in the occupied territory - and has never fought to oppose the practices and policies of their state. In fact, they duly serve in the reserve forces of the occupation army and as such are either perpetrators of or silent witnesses to the daily brutality of the occupation. Furthermore, the institutions in which they pursue their careers are firmly embedded in the system of oppression, and Israeli academics have done little or nothing to challenge the complicity of their institutions in this system.

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

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*Editor's note: We hope to return to this topic in a future issue of the BRICUP Newsletter.*

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### **Architects challenge Israeli breaches of professional ethics and international law.**

The latest move, beginning July 2008, by APJP (Architects & Planners for Justice in Palestine) at the International Union of Architects Congress in Turin, to call Israeli architects to account, was thwarted by a lack of will by the world architect member countries to put a motion forward. The

motion was formulated on advice from the UIA administration that it could be considered if just one member country would back it and present it to the Assembly. Several member countries were approached, but in the event, even though they said they were sympathetic to the issue, no country, not even the Palestinian delegate, agreed to back the motion whose signatories included prominent architects in the UK and abroad

<http://apjp.org/apjp-motion-to-the-uia/>

As I stated in an interview with Building Design, (the weekly architects' paper which reported on the event on 11 July 2008), the silence of the UIA representatives to propose a motion to censure Israel for its breaches of the UIA professional and ethical Charter, and well documented flouting of international law, is reminiscent of Africa's prolonged reluctance to criticize or censure Robert Mugabe's criminal excesses. The awesome alliance that Israel has with the US, the UK, and the EU, voicing allegiance to its mythical democracy, combined with the fear of the pro-Israel lobby's threats to architectural projects, made this tardiness to criticize quite unsurprising.

The motion to the UIA stated:

- 1) This Assembly resolves to ask all its member sections to require that their members only undertake work within the rulings of international law and the UIA Charter.
- 2) Pursuant to this, our colleagues in Israel are requested to take particular notice with regard to working on settlement projects on expropriated Palestinian land in the Occupied Territories and annexed East Jerusalem, that are deemed illegal under international law, including projects involving the dispossession of Palestinian and Bedouin citizens within Israel itself.
- 3) The Assembly should decide what appropriate action is to be taken in such cases by the UIA, the international guardian of professional and ethical standards in our profession, noting the precedent for action taken against the South African Institute of Architects in the 1970s.

This move was the culmination of a series of letters sent to the UIA president and the UIA, and also to the Israeli Association of United Architects, who said they only represented the professional, not the political activities of its members. It was backed by a petition placed in the Times in February 2006, and signed by scores of international architects and planners, many world famous, including prominent Israeli architects and NGO representatives, which led to the issue being discussed at three UIA Council meetings. The Petition

<http://apjp.org/signatories/>

stated: "Acting against international law, Israel continues to build illegal settlements on Palestinian territory. Israeli architects and planners have helped build settlements and towns on appropriated Palestinian land. Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine (APJP) assert that the actions of Israeli architects and planners working in conjunction with this enterprise, are unethical, and contravene professional codes of conduct and UIA codes. It is time to challenge the IAUA and the Israeli government to end such projects. We call on the Israeli Association of United Architects to adhere to UIA Codes of Conduct, and end the participation of their members and fellow professionals in creating 'facts on the ground' to obliterate the idea of a viable future Palestinian state."

The petition focused on three projects: Silwan, Lifta and E1. In Silwan, 88 Palestinian homes are under threat of demolition. This is part of a development for El Ad, the extreme ultra-religious Israeli settler movement, on illegally annexed Palestinian property. The E1 Plan expands the largest illegal settlement, Ma'ale Adumim, to link it with metropolitan Jerusalem; it will dissect the northern and southern West Bank, destroying the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian state. In Lifta, the ruins of a Palestinian village near Deir Yassin, were to be converted into a Jewish-only real estate development, to the exclusion of the original Palestinian inhabitants, some of whom lived nearby, and erasing their heritage and memory.

As a result of APJP's petition, which was also signed by five RIBA presidents (past, present and future) in a personal capacity, the UIA decided to set up a sub-committee on Ethics and Standards to investigate the issue and come up with recommendations. The member country (Germany) leading this committee failed to grasp the issue, which was backed by reams of evidence on international law and the illegality of the settlements, and also evidence of the destruction of unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev. The ethical committee's inaction led to our presenting of the motion to this important UIA Congress.

Somehow, the weekend before the Assembly meeting on 5 July 2008, the Israeli delegation got wind of the proposed motion. This was reported in Ynet news as "International Architects' Union to Boycott Israel?"

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3563988,00.html>

It claimed that "The group submitted a proposal to expel Israel from the UIA, stating that the Israeli architects are lending a hand to violations of international law by helping build residential units in the settlements and on confiscated Palestinian lands.", although the word boycott or expel was not mentioned, only asking what action the UIA intended to take on Israel for breaches of the UIA Charter and international law. It also said that "Architect Yitzhak Lipovetzky-Lir, the Israel Architects Association's representative at the conference, has been working vigorously over the past few days to thwart the boycott initiative." It said "that the Israeli association was extremely worried by the proposal, fearing it would eventually be adopted by the congress. This means Israeli architects won't be able to attend all of the organization's activities worldwide, including conventions and competitions, and cooperate with UN institutions. This will definitely place a black stain on Israeli architects," he said. "It will harm our international ties and our ability to work abroad."

In fact, for the past year or so, Israel had already been suspended from the UIA for not paying its

subscriptions. Ironically, our action prompted Israel to pay all its outstanding debts in order that it could speak on this motion.

But even so, it was still too late for it to be allowed to speak. When a vote was taken as to whether Israel should speak, needing a 75% majority, the delegates voted by 74.4% in agreement, meaning that Israel could not speak by 0.6%! In the event, no country stepped forward to present the motion, so in this architectural version of the Eurovision Song Contest, each member country had so far scored 'nul points'. Nevertheless, the action, as before, sparked off another debate on ethics in the architectural press, and architect Eli Abt, in a letter to BD, accused APJP of comparing Israel to Zimbabwe, and again quoted all the worlds' other terrible regimes that should have been picked on instead, like China.

Yet there is a difference between architects building for personal glory in dubious regimes abroad, and Israeli architects who act in total complicity with their own government and its military in the 40 years of brutal Occupation, in serial contravention of international law, and UN resolutions. If Israel maintains it is a western style democracy, and acts as if it is a part of Europe, it musn't complain if it is held to account by those concerned about its behaviour, which impacts right across the Middle East.

As with 'UK Architects Against Apartheid' during the SA apartheid era, which was supported by eminent architects here and abroad - many of whom now support APJP - and backed by other Israeli architects and human rights groups,(check [www.apjp.org](http://www.apjp.org)) it is important to uphold ethical, professional and moral standards in a key profession, where ever it operates, that is meant to benefit all society and humanity. It is now up to the UIA to strengthen its professional Codes with human rights as a key factor in its constitution.

The group 'British Architects Friends of Israel' has now changed its name to something called 'Constructive Dialogue". Each time the issue of Israel's architects action is raised, there are accusations of bias or anti-semitism, and is part



of the continuing attempts by the Israel lobby to counteract the pressure groups like APJP that show up the criminal activities of Israel's professionals in illegal settlement building - this is happening in the academic sphere against the academic boycott of Israeli institutions, and in the medical and legal fields.

Since the UIA is a branch of UNESCO, and embodies the same considerations of human rights as the UN, this issue of how far any professional body will go to protect or ignore its professional and ethical code of conduct will not disappear. At some stage the architectural bodies worldwide will have to debate these issues, and the struggle for justice for Palestine will go on.

Abe Hayeem, Chair of APJP.

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