

20 February 2012

Dear Sir Simon/Placido Domingo

The award of the 2010 Wolf Foundation prize for the arts places you in most distinguished company, which, we are sure, is as gratifying as it is deserved. But as you must know, there are implications in accepting such an honour from a prominent Israeli foundation, indeed from the hands of the President of the State of Israel in the Knesset, since this is in effect an Israeli award.

Israel's troubled and problematic situation puts it in an almost unique category, as an occupying power over territory and people in violation of many United Nations resolutions and the settled opinion of the international community. For more detail on this background we have provided a note, which is attached.

In 2005 practically every element of Palestinian civil society issued a call for boycott, divestment and sanctions to be applied to Israel (see <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=66>). The previous year representative Palestinian organisations made a similar call specifically for the boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions. We hope you will give thought to ways in which you can respond to this appeal for non-violent pressure to be put on Israel to end the occupation and the grave human rights abuses which have accompanied it.

We realise that for you to respond to this appeal may put you in an embarrassing situation – for example with those to whom you have made commitments. But consider whether you would have accepted the award of a similar prize from a South African foundation in the days of Apartheid. Yet that is a regime recognisably similar to present-day Israel, as many South Africans including

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu have acknowledged.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1957644.stm>.

We hope that you will decline the prize and make public your reasons for doing so. If however you should decide to accept it, we urge you to consider the opportunity you have to distance yourself from the political context at the award ceremony.

Yehudi Menuhin, who received the Wolf Foundation prize for the Arts in 1991, used his acceptance speech in the Knesset to denounce Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories. Here are his words:

"This wasteful governing by fear, by contempt for the basic dignities of life, this steady asphyxiation of a dependent people, should be the very last means to be adopted by those who themselves know too well the awful significance, the unforgettable suffering of such an existence. It is unworthy of my great people, the Jews, who have striven to abide by a code of moral rectitude for some 5,000 years, who can create and achieve a society for themselves such as we see around us but can yet deny the sharing of its great qualities and benefits to those dwelling amongst them." (*Jerusalem Post*, 6 May 1991)

Daniel Barenboim, who received the Wolf Foundation Prize for the Arts in 2004, issued a similar protest in his acceptance speech:

"Can a situation of occupation and control of another people be reconciled with (Israel's) Declaration of Independence?" he asked. "Is there logic to the independence of one people at the cost of a blow to the basic human rights of another people?"

"Can the Jewish people whose history is a record of continued suffering and relentless persecution, allow themselves to be indifferent to the rights and suffering of a neighboring people?" (<http://www.Israelforum.com>, 5 December 2004)

Barenboim devoted the prize money to support music education for Israeli and Palestinian youth.

David Mumford, co-winner of the Wolf Foundation prize for Mathematics in 2009, announced at the ceremony that he would donate the prize money to Bir Zeit University in the Occupied West Bank, and to Gisha, an Israeli organization dedicated to promoting the freedom of movement of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. He said:

"I decided to donate my share of the Wolf Prize to enable the academic community in occupied Palestine to survive and thrive. I am very grateful for the prize, but I believe that Palestinian students should have an opportunity to go elsewhere to acquire an education. Students in the West Bank and Gaza today do not have an opportunity to do that." (<http://www.Haaretz.com>, 23 June 2009)

The Israeli government hopes to burnish Israel's image as a bastion of culture and scientific progress by associating itself with you through the Wolf Foundation prize. The award, however, offers you the opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to justice and human rights including the rights of Palestinians denied to them by Israel. Members of BRICUP along with many other academics, scholars and artists earnestly count on you to do so.

With best regards

Dr. Robert Boyce, Secretary

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