

Collusion of the Israeli Medical Association with torture as state policy.

As many of you will know, the ever accumulating mass of evidence over the past 15 years at least of the collusion of the Israeli Medical Association with torture as state policy, and with systematic violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention in both Gaza and the Occupied West Bank, has had remarkably little impact on the UK Jewish medical establishment. Though there are outstanding exceptions, many UK Jewish doctors have strongly attacked publications by myself and others in Lancet, BMJ etc which drew attention to these realities (referencing a range of authoritative human rights organisations) and called for action. As I have noted before, the many hostile responses posted up at, say, bmj.com have been notable for an almost blanket lack of engagement with this evidence. The few that have done so in at least some measure content themselves with dismissive smears like "Amnesty International is anti-Israeli". And of course doctors seem as ready as others to play the ant-Semitic card!

Yet these same doctors would I am sure be straightforwardly supportive of published work pointing to comparable collusion by a national medical association and individual doctors if the case in point, was, say, Sudan or Guatemala. As soon as the case is Israel the situation is entirely different. I think the work of the sociologist Max Weber is useful here. He distinguishes between what he calls an "ethic of responsibility" and an "ethic of conviction". By "ethic of responsibility", he means to identify actions that demonstrate conformity to professional standards, and to ideas about accountability. The ethical duties that attach to being a doctor – whether coming from national codes or from, say, the World Medical Association's Declaration of Tokyo (forbidding doctors to collude with torture and mandating them to speak out) - reflect an ethic of

responsibility. Weber contrasts this with an "ethic of conviction", which reflect attitudes or actions that derive from personal values, convictions or identity. When it comes to Israel, there are many doctors whose ethic of conviction consistently trumps their ethic of responsibility in a way it might not do with other subject matters.

We have been trying to engage the UK Jewish doctors in a less polarised and potentially more productive debate, but for this we have to get them to look at the evidence. It was to this end that we invited three senior members of Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHRI) to come to Britain last spring and give a series of lectures. The evidence to which they pointed was of course telling. Subsequently I circulated a series of open letters to Dr Michael Baum, a well known and senior medical academic who had strikingly demonstrated the dominance of an ethic of conviction over an ethic of responsibility in his paper in the BMJ last year- this included the dismissal of the evidence of collusion by the IMA with torture as a "lie" and an unconditional statement of support for their probity. Though he is a well known proponent of evidence based medicine (for example, he has publicly opposed homoeopathic services in the NHS on the grounds of lack of evidence), I have to date been unable to get him to comment on any of the seminal publications upon which we base our case.

Thus I was interested and pleased when a couple of months ago Professor John Yudkin wrote to me to say that he had read the letters to Dr Baum and that there did seem something to talk about. He said that he was prepared to approach Dr Baum and interested others with a view to their engaging with PHRI and with the IMA. I have subsequently heard from Professor Yudkin that Dr Baum had now read the latest and utterly telling report of the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, called "Ticking Bombs". (www.stoptorture.org.il/eng/)

[images/uploaded/publications/140.pdf](#)). This report makes the everyday collusion of Israeli doctors with the torture of Palestinian men as clear as day (and names names). According to Professor Yudkin, Dr Baum was "clearly concerned" at the contents and was saying that the IMA needed to investigate and comment on these cases. The issue here is that prominent UK medical academics like Dr Baum and Professor Yudkin could, it seems to me, very easily make it clear to the IMA that they simply could not continue as they have been doing and retain any reputation in the eyes of Jewish doctors worldwide. It is not often that a few doctors could potentially wield so much capacity for good so easily! It is far from clear that Dr Baum has undergone a Damascene conversion (had he really not read any of the evidence before?) but we will see. In any event I now hear from Professor Yudkin that there is meeting planned between PHRI and the IMA. I await further news. In any event I am grateful to Professor Yudkin for his efforts and I hope he will stay involved.

Derek Summerfield

Torture, The Ticking Bomb and Impunity:

“The doctors give the prisoners pills and send them back to their cells where they will be tortured again”

On 18th September 2008, Sue Blackwell attended a meeting that was jointly organised by the Institute of Social Studies and Amnesty International. It took place in the Hague.

The guest speaker was Dr. Ishai Menuchin of the Public Committee against Torture in Israel (PCTI). Dr. Menuchin was one of the first Israeli soldiers who refused to serve in the first war against Lebanon in 1982, and was imprisoned as a result. He is a founder member of the refusenik organisation Yesh Gvul. His lecture was entitled “Torture, The Ticking Bomb and Impunity: Contradictions and Gaps of Personal

Responsibility and Systematic Impunity”. Below is Sue’s summary of his speech and the discussion afterwards.

The state is the main law-breaker

Every year, Israel releases some Palestinian prisoners, but imprisons others in their place. There are approximately 9,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails at any given time. There is a contradiction between the state’s espoused values - peace, the rule of law, etc. - and the actual lawlessness that is practised by institutions. The state is the main law-breaker, while private citizens who break the law pay dearly. Torture is justified on the grounds of necessity: every Palestinian is seen as a “ticking bomb”.

The General Security Service (GSS) is protected no matter what crimes it commits. One notorious case is that of “Bus No. 300”, when a GSS officer murdered two Palestinian prisoners and lied about it to the authorities. On 12th April 1984, four members of the PFLP hijacked a bus and forced it to drive to Gaza. The IDF stormed the bus and reported that all four had been killed. However, photos showed two of the hijackers being taken off the bus, injured but alive. In 1996, a retired GSS agent was quoted by Yedioth Ahronot as admitting that he had killed them on the orders of his superiors; but at the time there was a cover-up. The President of Israel, Chaim Herzog, awarded pre-trial amnesty to GSS personnel and evidence was suppressed. In 1987 the Landau Commission was appointed to investigate the GSS. Numerous cover-ups were exposed. The Commission recommendations said that torture in general was forbidden but “moderate physical pressure” was allowed in security investigations, thus allowing the GSS an escape route. The Commission wanted to change the systematic lying in court and the courts’ co-operation with it. However, it did not hold anyone accountable for the years of false testimony, evidence obtained through torture, etc. The victims went to prison while the perpetrators went free.

Today, an onion-like shield, constructed by lawyers, surrounds the practice of torture.

The “Onion-like” shield

The first layer is the GSS policy of refusing to identify its agents. During interrogation they use names like “Captain Franco”. The prisoner can’t identify his interrogators either by name or by number. One ex-prisoner learnt his former torturer’s name only when he saw him on TV.

The second layer is the fact that interrogations are not recorded. A law passed in 2002 requires video recordings, but from day 1 of its enactment, interrogations by the GSS were exempted. The police are also exempted from recording the physical or mental condition of suspects. A torture victim would have to give his eventual confession to the police, so they too are complicit if they accept confessions obtained under torture.

The third layer consists of the two kinds of memoranda: the internal ones recorded during interrogation and the versions for court consumption. **The fourth layer** is the fact that detainees can be held incommunicado indefinitely and prevented from seeing family or lawyers, so that no-one can witness the physical evidence of torture. **The fifth layer** is the disappearance of evidence from the victim’s medical files. Doctors in prisons are clearly aware of torture and other ill-treatment, but when we look for the evidence we can’t find it. We are now working with Physicians for Human Rights on this. **The sixth layer** is the practice of complaints about torture during interrogation being referred by the Attorney General to a special investigator who is employed by the GSS! The GSS official is responsible for investigating both his GSS colleagues and the detainee who registered the complaint. The allegations are invariably either denied or justified on “ticking bomb” grounds. The alleged torturer may even be present during the investigation, “so that the victim can identify him”. We used the Freedom of Information Act to find out how many cases had been investigated: not one had been upheld. **The seventh layer** is the Knesset. GSS Law 2000 grants the GSS impunity as long as they act “in good faith”. Information is kept classified and names are kept secret. Victims are not allowed to know whether or not their interrogation was authorised.

I hope we can crack this “**onion shield**”. The age of impunity must come to an end. If our lawyers can’t crack it within Israel, we must use international means.

Questions from the floor:

Q. *Is there a responsibility on third states to take action about this?*

A. We civil society activists know that we cannot trust the [Israeli] government. And because of the Holocaust industry etc. we can’t trust the US government or European governments either. We are working with international civil society rather than governments.

Q. BRICUP is calling for a boycott of the IMA and for its expulsion from the WMA because of the complicity of the Israeli medical establishment in torture. What is your view of this?

A. Doctors are taking part in interrogation - we are sure of it. We don’t know whether the doctors are actually in the interrogation cells, but often a prisoner tells us he has seen 3 or 4 doctors, yet none of them will give us evidence of torture. They give the prisoners pills and send them back to their cells where they will be tortured again. Together with Physicians for Human Rights we are collecting names, and we are asking what will be done in these cases: will the IMA investigate them or not? We have to give them a chance and see what they do about these cases before we call for a boycott of them.

Q. Do you oppose occupation as such or only torture?

A. We are a social change organisation: we fight against the occupation but we have to focus on fragments of it. We can use different strategies to convince our fellow Israelis that the occupation is wrong. For instance, the use of family members during interrogation - how can anyone condone that? We have a problem explaining that we are trying to protect the rights of civilians: in Hebrew the word for “civilian” and “citizen” is the same, so people think “civilian” only means “Israeli citizen”. But we have made a video for the internet which alternates the testimony of an Israeli soldier tortured by his Egyptian captors with that of a Palestinian tortured by the GSS. Some of the prisoners in Israeli jails are even from other countries: a Pakistani citizen was discovered recently, who had suffered “rendition” by the

USA to Israel via Jordan. These things need to be made public.

Sue Blackwell

See:-

Public Committee against Torture in Israel:

<http://www.stoptorture.org.il/en>

Physicians for Human Rights Israel:

<http://www.phr.org.il/phr/>

B'Tselem - the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories:

<http://www.btselem.org/english/>

<http://www.btselem.org/english/Torture/Background.asp>

Medical Committee for Boycott of the Israeli

Medical Association:

<http://www.boycottima.org/>

The PACBI column

‘Normalization’

In October, the widely-circulated Lebanese *Al-Akhabar* newspaper published a front-page article by two PACBI members under the title, “Will Foreign Universities in the Arab World Serve as Bridgeheads for Normalization with Israel?” The article ended with an appeal to Arab academics to take up the challenge of assuring that American and European academic institutions operating in Arab countries, particularly in the Gulf region, do not become vehicles for normalization with apartheid Israel and its institutions.

Briefly, there is cause for concern that American and European university campuses in the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf, may begin to serve as channels for drawing Israeli academics and students into the region, thus constituting environments that are conducive to Arab-Israeli normalization, despite widespread rejection of normal relations with Israel on the part of the people in the region. It should be noted that links with Israeli academic institutions are practically non-existent at Arab universities; even foreign universities like the American University in Cairo have come under great pressure from students and faculty to reject cooperation with Israeli universities.

It may be useful to share with European colleagues PACBI’s view of normalization, since this term has been the focus of much debate and frequent obfuscation, both in Palestine and in the Arab world at large. Palestinian and Arab academics, artists, women and youth activists are often invited to events purporting to advance Palestinian/Arab-Israeli “understanding” or “dialogue,” or to promote academic and cultural cooperation. The rationale behind such initiatives is objectionable from PACBI’s – and indeed most of Palestinian civil society’s – point of view, since it assumes—whether naively or not—that coexistence can be realized despite colonial and racist oppression and that “barriers” can be removed by dialogue and better communication, as if understanding among individuals can overcome the entrenched system that denies Palestinians their rights. These activities achieve nothing but give Israeli participants a good feeling that they are doing something and give the world a deceptive image of normalcy, thus undermining efforts to expose and counter Israel’s crimes and human rights violations; otherwise, the system of apartheid not only remains in place, but gets an extra dose of durability and legitimacy.

In 2007, PACBI issued a call to Arab academics and intellectuals offering this definition of normalization:

Normalization consists in participation in any activity or initiative, whether local or international, that is specifically designed to bring together—whether directly or indirectly—Palestinians and/or Arabs and Israelis (individuals as well as institutions), and which does not have as its main objective resisting the occupation and all forms of racial discrimination and oppression practiced against the Palestinian people. The most common forms of normalization are those activities that aim at Palestinian/Arab-Israeli cooperation in science, the arts, youth and women’s activism, and those that aim at “overcoming psychological barriers.” Exceptions are international forums taking place outside the Arab world with Israeli participation, but which do not specifically aim at bringing Palestinians or other Arabs together with Israelis; debates

are also excluded. Excluded also are any Arab-Israeli efforts aimed at addressing critical health or environmental emergencies that threaten human life.

In addition, PACBI believes strongly that Israeli participation in events held in Arab countries lends assistance to the determined effort by Israel and most western governments and some international institutions, like UNESCO, to force Israel upon the Middle Eastern region as another normal state and in particular to break the widely supported Arab boycott of Israel. PACBI finds some of the European Union cultural cooperation programs to be especially harmful and misguided in this respect; under these schemes, Arab and Palestinian recipients of grants supporting training and other workshops in the Arab world or in Europe find themselves forced by the stringent political conditions attached to such grants to work with Israelis against their will and often without prior notice. This practice is part of the overall European complicity in providing Israel the impunity it needs to carry on with its occupation and apartheid policies.

PACBI

‘OneVoice’ isn’t as inclusive as it sounds!

OneVoice Europe will be conducting a tour of UK Universities from 10th-15th November. This organisation, whose badge was prominently displayed by Paul McCartney on his recent trip to Israel (despite numerous calls for him to stay away), has an impressive Honorary Board of advisors which includes everyone from Dr. Saeb Erekat to Sir Jonathan Sacks, and describes itself as a "grassroots movement" promoting "conflict resolution". While claiming that it "does not propose any solutions" it is in fact rather dogmatic about an eventual two-state outcome, apparently not welcoming a more diverse debate about the possible forms that the end of occupation and apartheid could take.

BRICUP is highly sceptical of such organisations, with their wishy-washy-touchy-feely ethos

promoting "moderate voices" and condemning "extremism". While acknowledging that ending the occupation is a top priority for Palestinians, OneVoice doesn't actually campaign to bring this about, and gives equal prominence to Israeli concerns "to end terror and the existential threat to Israel". In short, its discourse implies equality between the two "sides". BRICUP believes that there is no equality between occupier and occupied and that organisations maintaining this pretence merely serve to promote the status quo.

BRICUP encourages its supporters to attend OneVoice's campus meetings and to argue in them for how international civil society can really make a difference - not by promoting spurious "dialogue" and "negotiations" that lead nowhere, but by supporting the Palestinian call for boycott, sanctions and divestment until Israel complies with international law.

Sue Blackwell.

This is OneVoice's website- judge for yourself:
<http://www.onevoicemovement.org>

British-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership

Last July Gordon Brown and the Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert held a joint press conference at the Knesset in Jerusalem at which they announced an initiative which they said was designed to strengthen academic cooperation between Britain and Israel. This move was a transparent attempt to reassure Israel of the UK government's commitment to resist pressure for an academic boycott of Israel's universities, in the wake of the vote at the UCU Congress 2 months earlier. BRICUP has now learnt that the British Council is to be responsible for distributing funds under this scheme. BRICUP wrote the following letter to Martin Davidson, Chief Executive of the British Council, on 16 October 2008. No reply had been received as of November 6th.

I am writing to you on behalf of BRICUP to express our dismay that the British Council has become involved with the administration of the

British-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership (BIRAX).

The reputation of the British Council is deservedly high, based as it is on the promotion of British culture abroad. That this is possible is due to no small extent to its degree of independence from UK government policies, especially those which are nationally or internationally controversial.

You should know that BIRAX is widely viewed as a thinly-veiled pro-Israeli initiative in the troubled waters of the Middle East. The money which is to be distributed is almost entirely provided by agencies of the UK Jewish community; UK government involvement provides a cosmetic gloss on this reality. The ostensible purpose of BIRAX is to strengthen academic cooperation between Britain and Israel. However it was surely conceived, and is widely viewed, as an act of reassurance to the Israeli government that it will oppose any moves towards a boycott of Israeli universities. As such it is also an intervention in an ongoing debate among the UK's academic community and its principal trade union.

It is sometimes argued that enhanced cooperation with Israeli academia provides that beleaguered liberal community with much needed encouragement in its opposition to the illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Would that that were so. In July this year 4 senior Israeli academics circulated a petition in favour of academic freedom for Palestinian faculty and students to the entire Israeli academic faculty. This mildest of statements, expressing no opposition to the Occupation itself, attracted signatures from just 4.5% of the 9000 academics who received it. The BIRAX scheme sends Israeli academia the message that, despite its moral cowardice or blindness, business as usual will not only continue but intensify.

The press release for the launch of BIRAX stated that it will "build and strengthen the already excellent academic links between universities in the UK and Israel". This raises the further issue of its partiality. No one could say that there were

"excellent academic links" between UK universities and Palestinian universities in the Occupied Territories. Yet it is relationships with Israeli rather than Palestinian universities that are to be fostered.

I think you should know that the British Council's involvement in this shoddy transaction can do its reputation very considerable harm. I would ask you to think again about your involvement.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jonathan Rosenhead, Secretary,
BRICUP.

Student disciplined for refusing to shake hands with Peres.

Ali Bahar, chairperson of the Palestinian Student Union at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was detained for three hours by university and presidential security officials on November 2nd after refusing to shake the hand of visiting President Shimon Peres. Bahar's student card was confiscated and a university disciplinary committee will be convened to decide on disciplinary measures, if any, against Bahar. Peres, who was visiting Hebrew University on the first day of the 2008-2009 academic year, and was walking through the library and shaking hands with students when he encountered Bahar. In an interview <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/1033605.html>> with Haaretz, Bahar noted that 'I have a right to not shake hands with those I do not want to shake hands with.' The Alternative Information Center (AIC) has sent a strong message of solidarity to Ali Bahar and supports his principled decision not to honor Israeli President Shimon Peres in light of the latter's active participation in Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories and violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. Adalah <<http://www.adalah.org/>> , will provide legal representation and assistance to Bahar in his disciplinary committee meeting should that option be possible.

Despite both telephone and written requests, Hebrew University has declined to respond to AIC questions in this matter. To counter the Palestinian and international movement to boycott Israeli universities, the Hebrew University issued a joint statement with al-Quds University in May 2005. This statement against boycott notes that 'our position is based upon the belief that it is through cooperation based on mutual respect, rather than through boycotts or discrimination, that our common goals can be achieved.' This statement is designed to ensure the steady flow of international research funding, and does not necessarily reflect the daily reality at Hebrew University for the 10% of its students who are Palestinian citizens of Israel. As the AIC documented in its 2007 publication *The Case for Academic Boycott Against Israel*, not only have Israeli academic institutions not publicly condemned Israel's occupation, but these very institutions are themselves part and parcel of Israel's colonial system of oppression against the Palestinians.

Report from the Alternative Information Center (AIC) See <<http://www.alternativenews.org/news/english/the-case-for-academic-boycott-against-israel-20070823.html>>
To read the whole article, see <<http://www.alternativenews.org/news/english/hebrew-university-in-jerusalem-denies-freedom-of-expression-to-chair-of-palestinian-student-union-20081103.html>> .

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support. The recent, and well overdue, redesign of our website absorbed much of our reserves and 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.

You can make a one off donation

- by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK

- by making a bank transfer to BRICUP
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 better if people pledge regular payments by standing order. You can download a standing order form from www.bricup.org.uk/documents/StandingOrder.pdf
More details from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

Events in November

November 10-15th

'One Voice' tour of UK Universities

See the item by Sue Blackwell in this Newsletter.

November 17-23rd

Right to Education Week

organized by Action Palestine

For details see:

<http://www.actionpalestine.org/r2e/>

November 26th

Bethlehem Now: Nine Alternative Lessons and Carols for Palestine

For ensemble & audience, at St James church, Piccadilly, Wednesday November 26th at 7.30pm. *Traditional carols with untraditional lyrics to highlight current reality in the Holy Land, with poetry and prose readings. Special guests. More details to be announced.*

November 29th

Meeting for all BRICUP supporters at SOAS

on Saturday, November 29th

Speakers will include Gideon Levy, Ilan Pape and Samia al Botmeh,

See Newsletter #9 and www.bricup.org.uk for more details.

Comments and suggestions concerning the Newsletter are always welcome.

Email to newsletter@bricup.org.uk