

BRICUP Newsletter 117

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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Israeli Liberals oppose University in OPT joining them, so as to protect themselves, not Palestinians.

Haim Bresheeth

Some 200 Israeli academics, out of over 10,000, have signed a call to the Israeli Higher Education Council, the body in control of all Israeli universities, calling upon it to not go along with the decision of a recent Ministerial committee. Why only 200 of them? What has got their goat? Should we be thankful for small mercies? [This call](#) was published by Haaretz, on December 28, 2017.

The Israeli Higher Education Council, part of the Ministry of Education, has never been in control of the colleges Israel has built in the occupied

areas after 1967, as these areas do not belong to Israel, both under Israeli and international law. Hence, such a body could not control institutions outside of Israel's borders, such as they are. In order to control such colleges, the Israeli Defence Ministry, responsible for overall control of occupied Palestinian territories, has set up a bizarre body within the Ministry itself, called the Higher Education Council for Judea and Samaria, which was responsible for such colleges. Indeed, a few years ago, when Ariel College wished to become a University, this questionable body dealing with illegal institutions set up in illegally occupied territories, has dealt with the application and agreed it in record time, despite the obvious shortcomings of this institution of Israeli apartheid. Despite its name, the Higher Education Council for Judea and Samaria has never taken any interest in the many Palestinian institutions of higher education in the Occupied Territories, nor has it supported them with a single shekel; this despite the clear instruction in the 4th Geneva Convention about the responsibility of any occupying power for the education of populations under its control, and also despite the fact that Palestinians have been paying taxes to Israeli exchequer ever since 1967. Such taxes were used to finance the occupation and the building of settlements, instead of supporting the population.

Indeed, when the case of the Ariel College was discussed at the Higher Education Council for Judea and Samaria, about the same number of Israeli academics called for its case to be dismissed, as it was not a proper candidate, and was not in Israel; their call was unheeded, and the college was made into a University under the Ministry of Defence, an exciting combination of interests.

Recently, as part of the wave of Israeli legislation pushed by the governing coalition, in order to remove the negative connotation of Israel's occupation's illegality, a committee of ministers has decided to 'move' this illegal HEI into Israel, or rather, to move Israel into the West Bank, by making the Israeli Higher Education Council responsible for the Ariel 'University', as if it was situated within the boundaries of Israel. This is an obvious part of the move to make Apartheid legal, as well as the occupation itself, thus removing the basis, so they believe, for BDS against such bodies, as they will now be considered to be within Israel.

One is reminded, of course, of earlier similar moves by occupying governments; in 1939, when Germany occupied over half of Poland, as a result

of the war and the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement, the German law was enforced in the western part of Poland, which was annexed to Germany, while the rest of Poland under German occupation was put under a military government, called *Generalgouvernement*, where military law was in force. Israel's decision is making the West Bank into a *Generalgouvernement*, in which there are habitations and settlements which are defined as *Israeli*. The Israeli law then applies to the colony, the Israeli settlers living there illegally, while the Palestinian population remains under occupation and military law control. There could hardly be a better example of Apartheid.

This was also clear to the 200 academics who signed the petition. They realised that by the Ariel 'university' joining them under the Israel Higher Education Council, they themselves are likely to become the target of intensified BDS activity, as they would now be controlled by a body which is part of legalising illegal occupation; they signed the call in order to defend their own institutions from BDS, rather than to protest the illegality of the occupation, or to support Palestinian academics (who are not even mentioned) in any way. Their motives can be clearly determined by the wording of this heart of the petition:

"Recently, a collaboration agreement was signed between Israel and the European Union, which excludes the settlements. Also, the main programme Horizon2000 does not allow finance for researchers who are based beyond the 'green line' [in the Occupied territories]. Ariel University is based at a settlement, and hence cannot be included in such arrangements. The annexation of the Ariel University to Israel makes the whole Israeli academia an active party to the occupation, as it is conceived in Europe and other parts of the world. This will be justly seen as an effort by the Israeli government to fool the world, and 'legitimise' Ariel University, while the likely outcome may be the de-legitimation of the totality of Israeli academia and research.

Thus, we call upon you not to be party to the decision by the Ministerial Committee, and assist in stopping a move of severe and dangerous potential to the illustrious Israeli academia and to all academics in the Universities and colleges within Israel's boundaries."

It is clear that such signatories do not themselves see the occupation as illegal – they are merely referring to 'as it is conceived in Europe and other parts of the world'. They themselves do not call for an action against the occupation, its illegality,

or for an immediate end to it. They are worried about more serious issue – the possible dangers to the massive support coming from Europe for the Israeli academia and its research – which is an integral part of the occupation, and contributes to it. They have no problem with Ariel University – they just do not wish to be endangered by being associated with it!

Then you have to take into account that this small group – less than 2% of the total, are the exception to the rule. The rest of Israeli academia could not even bring themselves to sign this misleading ‘liberal’ call. The rest of Israeli academia is so much to the right of this group, that even signing this call was unacceptable to them. So, should we be thankful for such small mercies, when the main call here is to avoid damage to one of the richest academic communities in the western world, supported generously not just by the Israeli government, but also by the EU – who have supported Israeli academia 1000 times more than their support for Palestinian academia* as well as most generous support by American, Canadian and other western nations. This makes Israeli academics the most supported group of academics on the planet – is it any wonder they may be worried about losing such support?

So, what at first glance may look like a critical move by 2% of Israel’s academics, is no more than a self-defence exercise, at the cost of their Palestinian colleagues. More reason than ever before to support BDS and the Academic Boycott!

*For a report on EU funding of Israeli research, contact the author at newsletter@bricup.org.uk

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The Definition That Never Was

Jonathan Rosenhead

Q: When is a definition not a definition? A: When it’s a press release

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism has gone round the world. It has been adopted as a guide to policy by the UK government (and those of Austria and Romania), and approved and recommended by the European Parliament. In the UK it has been accepted in explicit votes by around 10 English local

authorities, mostly in London but also including Birmingham and Manchester.

But it’s a fake. It was never approved by IHRA itself; and arguably its rapid spread has been greatly facilitated by the emotive power of ‘holocaust remembrance’ attached to its wording. Which it should not have.

The title of this article is a riff on the celebrated factually-based book and film “The Man Who Never Was”. The story, from memory, was of a successful attempt during World War 2 to fool the Germans into thinking that an impending allied invasion would take place in Greece rather than the actual target Sicily. The modus operandi was to acquire a dead body (don’t ask); equip it to look like a plane crash victim; secure documents to the corpse which ‘revealed’ Greece as the target; and then let it wash up on the coast of Spain on the prevailing current. They relied on the Spanish authorities alerting the Germans to the find.

We will see as my story unfolds that there is an uncanny resemblance of this scenario to the journey of the ‘definition’. Are Mossad’s spooks film fans?

Origins

As in all good thrillers we don’t know everything that happened. The story starts in 2005 when a working party set up by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC – an agency of the European Union) reported back with a ‘Working Definition of Antisemitism’. This consisted of a 2-sentence definition plus a page or so of guidance giving 11 illustrative examples of statements which could be antisemitic (depending on the context). Of these examples 7 referenced Israel rather than Jews.

The principal author of this European definition was an American Zionist, Kenneth Stern, working for the American Jewish Committee. In recent [testimony](#) before the US Congress he explained the reason the definition was developed. It was drafted, he said, “with data collectors utmost in mind.” There seemed to be an up-tick in Western European antisemitic incidents, but every country was recording them on a different basis, and there was no single number to show the direction and extent of travel. That is not how the definition has, a decade and more later, been functioning. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Back in the day there were strenuous efforts by Israel’s friends to get this definition active on the

public stage. Dennis McShane, then an MP (this was before his jailing for false accounting during the parliamentary expenses scandal) promoted it vigorously as chair of an inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism. But it never gained much traction, here or in other countries. In 2013 the EUMC's successor body the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) disposed of the definition. It had never been adopted by the EU, [a spokesperson said](#), and had now been removed from the FRA website "during a clear out of 'non-official' documents".

This then is the corpse – the unclaimed dead body that might yet serve a clandestine purpose.

The sting

Fast forward to 2016. Strenuous efforts to get the definition adopted somewhere influential were quietly proceeding without the sort of fanfare that could have alerted opposition. I believe that it came within 1 vote (that of Russia) of being accepted by OECD (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) – but OECD decisions have to be unanimous. And then in May that year it was adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance at its meeting in Romania. Seemingly.

IHRA is a 31-nation inter-governmental organisation (technically a coming together of governments, not of nations). All its members are, understandably, from Europe except for Argentina, Canada, the USA – and Israel. The news of the breakthrough in Bucharest came, after a one month delay, in an IHRA [press release](#) which said that the Alliance had adopted a working definition of antisemitism, and provided a link to the text.

There are two disconcerting aspects of this arrangement. The first is that the only presence of the decision on the IHRA website is this press release. No ceremonial banner headlines, or redesigned masthead. The second is the ambiguous wording and layout of the statement reached by the [link](#). This was however only realised in hindsight.

The payoff

The definition came ashore in Romania, rather than in Greece. Since then it has been making a triumphant progress round Europe, and beyond. If we just take the UK, our universities are still being bombarded by pro-Israel activists, citing the definition in support of their demands for the cancellation of campus events in support of Palestinian rights. At the time of last year's Israeli

Apartheid Week some universities fell into line. But the effects are more insidious than that, with the promulgation of the definition contributing to a general chill on freedom of expression on Israel/Palestine.

The unravelling

It was rather over a year later that rumours that all was not what it seemed began circulating. (By this time several governments and other bodies had adopted what they believed to be the text agreed by IHRA.) The Brussels-based ECCP (European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine) put out feelers through its member organisation, and then pursued clarification with the IHRA Secretariat in Berlin, which finally emerged towards the end on 2017. It turned out that what all these august bodies had been adopting was not an IHRA definition at all – it was the corpse of the EUMC definition, injected with preservatives, propped up and re-purposed.

The key section of the press release (the equivalent of the false documents in the corpse's attaché case, secured to the body by a chain) is as follows

“On 26 May 2016, the Plenary in Bucharest decided to adopt the following non-legally binding working definition of anti-semitism:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

The press release then continues:

“To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations:

.....]” and the text that follows is the set of 11 examples of potentially antisemitic statements which we have already encountered, seven of which target Israel rather than Jews.

Note that there is nothing about Israel in the material inside the box. What the IHRA Secretariat has now [revealed](#) is that it was only the boxed material that was discussed and agreed by the IHRA. Not the general words of guidance; and not that list of 11 statements, a list which attempts to taint criticism of Israel with antisemitism. These illustrations had adorned the EUMC version; they were not adopted by IHRA.

The reckoning

It is hard to believe that this all happened by accident. That this body did just arrive randomly on the shore, propelled by unpredictable ocean currents.

Clearly many people knew what the IHRA had actually decided in Bucharest: in particular the representatives of the 31 governments who participated in the plenary meeting. (Indeed the truth did eventually leak out from one of these participants.) Why did they allow the false document to be promoted round Europe, even adopted by their governments? Why was Teresa May not told before she committed the UK government to it? Why did the IHRA Secretariat allow the 'definition' to go ricocheting round the world in their name, when they knew it was a fake? Why was the press release formulated in so deceptive a way?

Could this all be coincidence? That seems unlikely. But nor does it take a conspiracy to make something like this happen. Those taking part (as plenary members, as IHRA officials) are deeply committed to commemorating the Holocaust, and presumably in opposition to any signs of recurrence of antisemitism. It is entirely possible, maybe probable, that many or most of them will feel an attachment, a commitment even, to Israel. When an apparent outcome had been announced that most supporters of Israel were quite happy with (even if it did contain a teeny fraud on the public) who would want to rock the boat?

The aftermath

It is hard to know what happens next. It is clear that energetic steps need to be taken to inform those public authorities and indeed governments that have adopted the 'IHRA definition' that they have been sold a pup. What are the chances that the mainstream media, here and elsewhere in Europe) will take up this story? It would be nice to think so but don't hold your breath. It is more likely to fall to those groups which promote human rights in general and those of the Palestinians in particular to make sure that the information gets around.

There are clearly a number of stances that the organisations (up to national governments) that have adopted the definition under false pretences may take:

- They may stuff their fingers in their ears
- They may say 'OK its not the IHRA definition, but we still like it and we are keeping it'

- They may say 'In that case we will just adopt the same 2 sentences as IHRA did'
- They may say 'Those 2 sentences are a lousy definition. We need a better one'
- They may say 'It is pretty obvious what antisemitism is. We managed till last year without a definition. Who needs a definition anyway?'

The efforts of those who support Palestine should be to get the organisational responses down towards the bottom of this list of options.

It is worth mentioning that the Labour Party got some stick at the time for adopting the definition almost in lock-step with the UK government. But they only adopted the two sentences, not the improperly inflated version. Hats off!

A better definition?

Those two sentences do not make an adequate definition. Inspect that box: A 'certain' perception? 'May' be expressed? There is an almost total lack of specificity. It could be this perception, or that, or indeed the other. And if antisemitism only 'may' be expressed through hatred, what are the other ways? This is a rank failure in defining. With hindsight it seems plausible that this vagueness was deliberate – to necessitate interpretation, to facilitate the inclusion of critiques of Israel within the dragnet.

It is quite possible that the promulgation of this deeply flawed definition has by now done sufficient damage to the previously consensual understanding of antisemitism that we do need a new one. This will need to be a definition that concentrates not on Israel, just on those negative perceptions of Jews (as members of a group, whether ethnically, religiously or culturally defined) which still do persist especially on the proto-fascist right that has reared up in Europe and the United States. Paradoxically these groupings just love Israel.



Mental health group urged not to meet in Israel

Martin Kemp, UKPMHN

Over the New Year our sister-organisation, the USA-Palestine Mental Health Network (USAPMHN), responded to the announcement that the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy (IARPP) intends to hold its 2019 Conference in Tel Aviv. Working with Palestinian psychiatrist Samah Jabr

MD, the USA group wrote to the Board of IARPP requesting that the decision be reconsidered. The letter was placed on the IARPP members' listserve, and for a brief moment there was an open exchange of views – this was quickly shut down. With the help of Jewish Voice for Peace, a petition was launched in support of the stance taken by USAPMHN on 8/1/18, which within a few days had collected over 450 signatures. The issue has received media coverage in Britain, the US and Europe (eg <http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/massive-remorseless-palestinians/>)

The outgoing President of the IARPP, Chana Ullman, has written articles critical of the Occupation; Jessica Benjamin, another Board member, has also conveyed a clear appreciation of the realities of the asymmetrical power relation in Israel/Palestine. Benjamin has theorised the social-psychological function of the 'moral Third' which, in the opinion of another American psychoanalyst, Stephen Botticelli, finds its expression - in relation to Israel/Palestine - in the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS). The IARPP has a strong representation in Israel, including members of the Psychoactive, a group whose work featured in a memorable conference held at Birkbeck College in 2009 (read an interesting report by Anthony Lerman here: <https://tinyurl.com/y8gw3y74>). The USAPMHN's letter of protest acknowledges the efforts that progressive clinicians within Israel/Palestine might make to ensure the event addresses the political situation, while still challenging the decision of an international organisation to locate an event in Tel Aviv.

Chana Ullman and Steven Kuchuck, her successor as President of IARPP, have responded in defence of this decision with familiar arguments (being non-political, keeping debate open, ensuring a high level of Palestinian participation, providing educational opportunities for participants etc). Their position forms the basis of a counter-petition, "Oppose Boycott of Israel by Psychoanalysts", which speaks in defence of academic freedom, and what it describes as the critics' 'simplistic' analysis of 'a complex geo-political and ethnic conflict with a long history'. This now has 350 names, though this cannot be confirmed as a good proportion of adherents have signed as 'Anonymous' (see <https://tinyurl.com/yct55tqt>).

The USAPMHN and the UKPMHN have each issued further statements answering these points (all documents available on our website, with

links on the homepage (<https://ukpalmhn.com/>). We invite readers with a connection to mental health to sign the USAPMHN petition, and to share the link with other individuals and groups who may be interested (at: <https://tinyurl.com/y812k938>).

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Palestinian Bar Association and Professors' Unions call on the European Society of International Law to boycott Israel.

The Palestinian Bar Association and the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUPE) have called upon on the European Society of International Law (ESIL) to move its upcoming research forum outside of Israel. Their their letter to ESIL below

December 13th 2017

Dear European Society of International Law Board Members,

We are writing from the Palestinian Bar Association, representing 10,300 lawyers, and the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUPE), which represents more than 6,000 Palestinian university staff at 13 institutions of higher education in the occupied Palestinian territory, to urge you to move the planned European Society of International Law (ESIL) Research Forum from the Hebrew University to outside of Israel.

We are, quite frankly, shocked that ESIL, an organization committed to the study and promotion of international law, would consider holding a scholarly event at an academic institution that is directly complicit in Israel's grave and ongoing violations of international law.

We echo the [statement](#) of the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC), comprised of ten of the most prominent Palestinian groups advocating for human rights based on international law, condemning ESIL's decision as "affront to the rule of law, and all those who believe in human rights and dignity" and "a ringing endorsement" of Israel's 50-year military occupation.

The PHROC statement notes that Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus "sits on Palestinian territory and in part on illegally seized private Palestinian property" in occupied East Jerusalem and is "part of Israel's illegal

settlement project: it provides housing and employment for nationals of the occupying power, and it benefits from the infrastructure of Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. It is one of the anchors of the settlement activity in the area.”

We are further alarmed at ESIL’s clumsy attempts to remedy what it clearly recognizes as the problematic nature of its decision, including encouraging Palestinian scholars to attend the conference.

This demonstrates staggering insensitivity to Palestinian academics and our union members who have witnessed their universities and schools [bombed](#), [raided](#) and [ransacked](#) by Israel’s military, have endured the indignities of Israeli military checkpoints, and are often denied by Israel the mere right to movement within the occupied Palestinian territory and [prevented from travel](#) abroad to further their research or attend conferences.

Hebrew University [maintains close ties with the Israeli authorities](#) carrying out direct attacks on Palestinians’ right to education, providing special privileges to Israeli soldiers and security personnel and collaborating with the Israeli army in training officers and recruits.

This is no place for an international scholarly event on any topic, let alone on international law.

Over 100 international legal scholars and lawyers have signed a [statement](#) calling on ESIL to reconsider its decision and committing not to participate in the research forum as currently planned.

We are aware that a member of the organizing committee for the research forum [withdrew](#) last month, stating that “[d]espite the goodwill of all those involved, the very presence of ESIL at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem remains objectively problematical” and that the mitigating measures put in place “cannot take away the fact that for many in Palestine, Israel and beyond, holding our Research Forum at HUJI will serve to normalize and sanitize Israel’s colonial policies.” We commend him for this principled decision.

We call on you to stand in solidarity with your Palestinian colleagues by moving the event outside of Israel until such time as Israel respects Palestinian rights guaranteed under international law that ESIL purports to promote.

Sincerely,

*Palestinian Bar Association
Palestinian Federation of Unions of University
Professors and Employees (PFUUBE)*

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Stand Against Apartheid Lawfare -A call from the American Studies Association (ASA) to sign their petition.

#boycottracism!

The Louis D. Brandeis Center is engaged in lawfare against members of the American Studies Association, against the association itself, and against the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (<http://www.usacbi.org/>). This lawfare takes the form of a frivolous and racist lawsuit.

As experts at Palestine Legal have explained: “The Brandeis Center is seeking to fix the failed theory of their original lawsuit against the American Studies Association (ASA) by asking the court for permission to add new theories and new defendants. Doubling down on the harassment campaign, the Brandeis Center is also on a McCarthyist media blitz accusing ASA scholars of a covert campaign to take over the ASA” (<https://palestinelegal.org/news/2016/4/20/palestine-legal-statement-on-lawsuit-against-asa>).

This lawsuit, as the brief filed by the ASA notes, “is being used as a platform from which Plaintiffs and their supporters can mine for data with which to harass anyone whose views differ from the Plaintiffs’ and their supporters.”

In March 2017, the court dismissed most of the Brandeis Center’s charges against the ASA. The court found that the ASA resolution was “enacted for academic purposes” as it “was aimed both at encouraging academic freedom for Palestinians and strengthening relations between American institutions and Palestinians.” And yet, the Brandeis Center has persisted in its harassment. The Center filed a motion this November 2017, naming further members of the ASA who, we note, are predominantly queer, indigenous/Palestinian, and women of color, despite the fact that those working towards the resolution also included white (and specifically white Jewish) ASA members, and although an overwhelming majority of the ASA membership voted in favor of the resolution.

The motion's charges distort a democratic political process. The ASA voted by a 2-1 margin of the membership in favor of boycott after a year of open, public debate within the Association. The Lawsuit attempts to describe this vote as a secret conspiracy of deception, one in which elected ASA leaders "infiltrated" the organization and engaged in "an illegal, hostile takeover" of the ASA. Such charges ignore the several years of public and open grassroots organizing by established caucuses within the ASA; the panels, town hall and open meetings set up to educate the membership and debate the resolution; and finally an unprecedented and overwhelmingly positive vote by the entire membership when passing a resolution requires only the support of the National Council. Indeed, the "secret" process that the plaintiffs are "unearthing" through harassing methods and lawfare is available in the open and detailed account given in the recently published book Boycott!

(<https://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520294899>). Detailed public accounts of the ASA campaign have also been published in the New York Times

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/17/education/scholars-group-endorses-an-academic-boycott-of-israel.html>), the Chronicle of Higher Education (<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Scholars-Debate-Significance/143645>), and the Association's own flagship journal, American Quarterly (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/605053>).

In the wake of the resolution, the ASA membership has increased, and the BDS movement itself is steadily gaining popular and academic support. Since the ASA vote, the National Women's Studies Association, the National Association of Chicano/a Studies, and the Critical Ethnic Studies Association have all voted to boycott Israeli universities.

With its lawsuit, the Brandeis Center continues its sustained and increasingly desperate campaign to criminalize any criticism of Israel, or any Palestine solidarity work. Their unscrupulous actions that support practices of settler colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, and white supremacy, McCarthyism, Islamophobia, and racism in the US find their counterpart in the actions of Donald Trump and the "alt right."

Please take a stand to resist such forces! Please sign below to express solidarity with those being targeted, censured, and held singly responsible for a democratic process and vote. And, in doing so, show your support as well for the ASA and for

the right to engage in BDS organizing free of harassment, lawfare, and racist and colonial campaigns of intimidation!

*Organizational Endorsers

US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

Labor for Palestine

Jews for Palestinian Right of Return

Jewish Voice for Peace

Committee for Open Discussion of Zionism

US Campaign for Palestinian Rights

Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine (AURDIP) France

Faculty for Palestine (Toronto, Canada)

To sign, and to see the list of signatories, go to

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc5dyfIRI36h54jdQWRTCJ49H5JSEazi8XOKN-I7HpivrUqEw/viewform>

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A response to the Universities Minister's threat to students over 'no platform policy' .

On Boxing Day, the then Universities Minister, Jo Johnson issued a direct threat to student unions implementing a 'no platform' policy towards selected individual and organizations on the grounds that they infringed freedom of speech on campuses. This not only generated a vigorous response from student bodies and politicians alike (<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/dec/26/student-leaders-criticise-jo-johnson-after-threat-over-no-platforming-policies>) but, more significantly, a challenge to Johnson's record on freedom of speech on Palestine, which appeared in letters to the Guardian printed below.

December 28th: From Jonathan Rosenhead (BRICUP Chair, Vice chair of Free Speech on Israel)

Jo Johnson has decided to grasp the nettle of free speech at universities ([Students attack no-platform threat](#), 27 December). It's a prickly subject.

The minister seems to have "no-platforming" by student unions in his sights. However, there is a major free-speech failure by the universities themselves that is easier to fix. For some years now universities, not the student unions, have been routinely obstructing campus events that focus on Palestinian rights and their denial by

Israel. The government's own adoption of the discredited [IHRA definition of antisemitism](#) a year ago has fuelled this, with play-safe administrations seemingly unclear about the difference between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. It was Jo Johnson himself who instructed Universities UK to send this definition round to all universities – with a pointed suggestion that they adopt it for internal use. No single act in recent years has been less helpful to free speech in universities.

Campus installations (eg mock checkpoints) have been refused permission, and meetings face a barrage of bureaucratic barriers up to outright cancellation. The threat of disturbances by pro-Israel demonstrators has resulted in the imposition of sky-high security charges – in these cases, instead of protecting free speech, universities have negated it. In 2016 an entire international conference was cancelled on security grounds by the University of Southampton; it was subsequently held successfully in Ireland.

Freedom of speech is legally protected everywhere, and doubly so at universities – under the European convention on human rights, as well as the [Education Act 1986](#). Universities are thus under a positive obligation to protect freedom of speech. Assuming that the minister means what he says, he shouldn't be threatening the universities with fines for what their student unions (independent bodies) are doing. Rather, he should be telling universities in terms that their own erosion of free speech will not be tolerated.

31st December: From Joseph Pearlman.

Much of [Jonathan Rosenhead's letter](#) (29 December) was devoted to Israel and Palestine. He makes the tendentious claim that the [IHRA definition of antisemitism](#) is discredited. A small minority has disputed the definition, but there is no evidence that it is discredited. He then makes the charge that UK governments have been unclear about the difference between antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

Most Jews in the UK would challenge the idea that there is much difference between the two. In recent years, anti-Zionism has manifested itself as opposition to the existence of a specifically Jewish state. In a 2015 survey, The Attitudes of British Jews to [Israel](#), “90% of British Jews support Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state”, the implication being that current anti-Zionism will be experienced as antisemitism. While it is clear that there was a very large

immigration into Israel/Palestine during the 20th century, there has been a continuous history of Jewish settlement there for 3,000 years, so the demand for a Jewish state was not inconsistent with demands for their own state by ethnic groups in other countries.

This does not, however, continue over as unmitigated support for the Israeli government. In the same survey, 68% of British Jews “feel a sense of despair every time Israel approves further expansion of settlements on the West Bank”. This is consistent again with the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which states that “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic”.

Legitimate criticism of the Israeli government is therefore perfectly acceptable in British universities. Anti-Zionist opposition to the existence of Israel is not.

Joseph Pearlman
London

January 2nd: From Jonathan Rosenhead.

Joseph Pearlman responds thoughtfully to my letter (29th December) about freedom of speech on Israel in universities. The excellent Yachad survey of Jewish attitudes on Israel did indeed find that 90% of respondents supported Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. But his conclusion that therefore “current anti-Zionism will be experienced as antisemitism” won't stand up.

In answer to the Yachad survey question “Do you consider yourself to be a Zionist?” 31% responded “No”, with a further 10% “Not sure”. So there we have 41% of British Jews who surely do not regard anti-Zionism as antisemitic. And the trend is also against him: those saying “Yes” dropped by 13% over the previous five years.

He also asserts that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism is not discredited, as I stated, but simply “disputed”. The document, adopted by our government in December 2016, consists of a quite vague two-sentence statement followed by a “guidance” page of examples of criticisms of Israel that could be antisemitic. It is now known that IHRA itself only adopted those two sentences, not the guidance that has been pumped out alongside it. The Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn had the good sense not to fall for this scam.

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South Africa's largest university backs a boycott of Israel

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel in South Africa (BDS South Africa)

www.bdssouthafrica.com |

13 December 2017.

South Africa's largest residential university, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) which has over 60,000 students, has resolved to support the academic boycott of Israel. Principal of TUT, Professor Lourens Van Staden, in a public statement explained that: "The Council of the Tshwane University of Technology formally approved a recommendation by the Institutional Forum that TUT will not have any ties with Israel, Israeli organizations and institutions

Relations with the State of Israel, Israeli organisations and institutions

On 24 November 2017, the Council of the Tshwane University of Technology formally approved a recommendation by the Institutional Forum that TUT will not have any ties with Israel, Israeli organisations and institutions.

In 2016, the Embassy of Israel hosted a conference in South Africa bringing together some of the most prominent water researchers specialising in water usage in water-scarce countries. On conclusion of the conference the Ambassador undertook to distribute the book *Let there be Water*, authored by Seth Siegel, to universities in South Africa.

The Ambassador visited TUT's Faculty of Science due to its expertise in water-related studies in the Departments of Environmental, Water and Earth Sciences, Environmental Health, as well as its water-related Research Chairs. The nature of the visit was to distribute and donate copies of the book to departments within the Faculty, as well as copies for the Science Library.

As a result, TUT received queries from our student organisations, staff members, Palestinian human rights activists, as well as from a group of Jewish Israeli citizens who are opposed to their country's occupation of Palestinian land.

As a progressive University in a democratic South Africa, we want to affirm that TUT will not sign any agreements or enter into scientific partnerships with any Israeli organization or institution until such time that Israel ends its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.

The University will not stand back and accept the violations of the Israeli government when it confines the movement of Palestinian children and youth on their own land and restricts their ability to access education through destroying the schools.

TUT furthermore supports the call by various bodies, including student bodies and other progressive organisations to boycott Israel and Israeli institutions for as long as Israel continues to violate the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, as well as international laws.

The chairperson of TUT's Institutional Forum, Gugu Xaba, welcomed the decision of his university: "TUT is joining other human rights respecting institutions including our colleagues at the University of Johannesburg who also terminated their relations with Israel in 2011. This is another major win for the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement contributing to a formidable momentum for Palestine! We salute all those involved in taking this decision."

Belgian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI)

Monthly Newsletter

<https://app.flashissue.com/newsletters/30dced7a5ee0287f8bc12c05bb9b3dd0ada147ab>

Newsletter number 31 (January, 2018) from BACBI includes an open letter from academics at Birzeit University in Palestine calling on the academic community to protest the Israeli government's deliberate harassment of international students and academics who travel to Palestine in order to study or work in Palestinian academic institutions.

Sign the Commitment by UK Scholars to Human Rights in Palestine

This commitment, which has been signed by over 700 academics across UK's higher education system, is not to accept invitations for academic visits to Israel, not to act as referees in activities related to Israel academic institutions, or

cooperate in any other way with Israeli universities.

It is a response to the appeal for such action by Palestinian academics and civil society due to the deep complicity of Israeli academic institutions in Israeli violations of international law. Signatories have pledged to continue their commitment until Israel complies with international law, and respects Palestinian human rights.

For more information, and to sign, go to <http://www.commitment4p.com>

Notices

Speakers: 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

Register as a supporter of BRICUP

You can register as a supporter of BRICUP and of the academic and cultural boycott of Israel [by completing this form](#).

We recognise that many individuals may wish to support our aims by private actions without wishing to be publicly identified. Supporters receive our regular newsletter by email and receive occasional emails giving details of urgent developments and of ways to support our activities. We do not disclose the names of our supporters to anyone outside BRICUP or share them with any other organisation.

Financial support for BRICUP

We welcome one-off donations, but we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

You can [download a standing order form](#) here.

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

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