

BRICUP Newsletter 68

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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Sound and fury at the Proms over “apartheid” remark

Violinist Nigel Kennedy sent Israel’s apologists into a mighty spin during a Promenade concert in London on August 8 when he used the word “apartheid” to refer to the life circumstances of the young Palestinian musicians with whom he was sharing the stage.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Kennedy, addressing an overwhelmingly supportive audience for his innovative performance of Vivaldi’s Four Seasons at the Royal Albert Hall, “it’s a bit facile to say it, but we all know from experiencing this night of music tonight, that given equality and getting rid of apartheid gives a beautiful chance for amazing things to happen.”

Kennedy, an [enfant terrible of the classical music world](#), had not played at the Proms for years but took advantage of a radical mix of programmes this time to revisit the Four Seasons with a number of jazz musicians, his own largely Polish Orchestra of Life and 17 players from the Palestine Strings wearing trademark keffiyehs. Aged between 12 and 23, these protégées of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music demonstrated considerable artistry in one of the world’s greatest performance spaces. No wonder the Zionist reaction to their mentor’s solidarity comment was so swift and strong.

Within days the [Jewish Chronicle announced](#) with satisfaction that the BBC intended deleting Kennedy’s remark from its edited TV broadcast of the concert. Baroness Ruth Deech, a prominent Zionist and former BBC governor, had pronounced his words “offensive and untrue” and unfit to be heard during a Prom concert. The BBC, saying they did not “fall within the editorial remit of the proms as a classical music festival,” [duly obliged](#). The critically-acclaimed concert went out on BBC4 on August 23 without the offending comments.

In the interim BRICUP chairman Jonathan Rosenhead had joined supporters of Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, among them actress Miriam Margolyes and writer/comedian Alexei Sayle, in signing a letter contesting the BBC censorship decision. It was published on August 22 in the Daily Telegraph (scroll down through the other letters to find it [here](#)) along with a [fair-minded article](#) by the paper’s Religious Affairs editor John Bingham. The Jewish Chronicle named BRICUP and Rosenhead in [its coverage](#).

The issue was taken up by wider [activist circles](#) with writers’ organisation PEN and Index on Censorship

weighing in in Kennedy's defence. Rock legend Roger Waters of Pink Floyd was moved to issue a long-awaited [statement](#) calling on fellow musicians to back the boycott.

A [petition](#) calling on the BBC to revoke its censorship decision quickly garnered more than 1,200 signatures. Music commentator Norman Lebrecht, himself deeply pro-Israel, [picked up the story](#), calling into question the provenance of a statement in which Kennedy described his comments as “purely descriptive and not political whatsoever” and denounced the BBC’s “imperial lack of impartiality”. The flighty genius does not own a computer or use any new-fangled digital media so the statement was issued via a musician friend’s Facebook page. As a matter of interest, Lebrecht later posted [YouTube footage](#) of the concert, generating serious and largely favourable discussion on his blog.

Matters were complicated by Kennedy’s own manager Terri Robson - presumably with an eye to her charge’s potentially lucrative future bookings - publicly suggesting that the BBC was within its rights to censor him. Thanks to links with pro-Palestinian classical musicians who are in contact with Kennedy – he does at least own a mobile phone - we were primed and ready when he once again reiterated his pro-Palestinian stance in an [open letter](#) to the Palestine Strings. He observed that his comment would surely not *“have been censored if it had been referring to the benefits of the demise of the apartheid in South Africa when playing with an African ensemble”*.

Kennedy’s letter suggested that the Palestine Strings had been detained for 12 hours on their return to Palestine. This turned out to be a misunderstanding. The players were not detained but Edward Said National Conservatory of Music’s Orchestras Manager, Tim Pottier, was held for 12 hours at the Allenby Bridge. An official at the conservatory explained in a private email, “Tim is now sadly used to long interrogations and waiting at the Bridge, although the return from the Prom established a record. The occupying authorities who control all entries to Palestine know him far too well and, I suspect, do not like what he does.”

This incident, naturally enough, was not deemed newsworthy by mainstream media. Indeed, although the Telegraph’s Bingham refers to “a bitter row over alleged censorship”, others showed zero interest in the BBC censorship story. One late entry into the fray was pundit Dominic Lawson who chose to use his [valedictory column](#) in the Independent on

September 2 to slag off Kennedy and Waters as part of a sinister army of antisemites holding Israel responsible for all the evils of the world. His attack highlights the care supporters of BDS need to take in the terminology they use. Waters has defended himself expertly when challenged, but drawing attention to Baroness Deech’s Jewish-sounding maiden name (“nee Fraenkel”) rather than referencing her vociferous Zionism, and shooting down a pig-shaped zeppelin emblazoned with a Star of David (albeit alongside other symbols of oppression), has handed ammunition to the enemies of BDS. A [call](#) from a small group of German Jews to boycott a forthcoming concert by Waters has won mainstream coverage denied to the injustice done to Kennedy.

It remains to be seen, at the time of writing, if any further controversy will follow Kennedy’s planned appearance at the Last Night of the Proms on September 7. As he himself noted when news of the BBC’s censorship plan became known: “. . . the BBC has created . . . a huge platform for the discussion of its own impartiality, its respect (or lack of it) for free speech and for the discussion of the miserable apartheid forced on the Palestinian people by the Israeli government supported by so many governments from the outside world.”

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi,
Secretary, Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods.

The PACBI Column

On the Academic Boycott Front: A Pioneering Campaign

Last month, over 150 academics, including at least 50 oral historians from across the globe, launched a campaign to persuade the oral history community not to participate in the June 2014 'International Conference on Oral History' organised by the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and to put pressure on keynote speakers to cancel their participation [1]. At PACBI, we found it important to highlight this campaign for its pioneering role in mobilizing a large group of academics and in building the networks needed to cancel an academic event.

In recent months, there have been several victories on the academic boycott front, not least of which

were Stephen Hawking's heeding of the boycott and withdrawing from a conference sponsored by Shimon Peres, the Teachers Union of Ireland's endorsement of the academic boycott, the decision by the 100,000-strong federation of Francophone students in Belgium to sever all links with Israeli universities, and the resolution in favor of academic boycott passed by the Asian American Studies Association. On the heels of this, a group of academics, mainly in the US (USACBI), Britain (BRICUP) and France (AURDIP), decided to take PACBI's call for boycotting conferences at complicit Israeli institutions to a higher level. A concerted and well-coordinated campaign has been launched, similar in nature to those in the cultural realm, to gather signatures from and mobilize the academic community against the oral history conference at Hebrew University due to the institution's well-documented complicity in Israel's violations of human rights and international law.

The campaign is based on the fundamental principle that the academic freedom afforded to individual academics does not extend to giving academic institutions a carte blanche to freely conduct their activities any way they like and with total disregard to international law, principles of basic morality and human rights. Institutions must be held accountable for their role in society and their complicity in their state's criminal behaviour. As previous PACBI statements have mentioned, and as the campaign letter states, the principles of the boycott are mindful of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights' definition of academic freedom that includes: the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the state or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction. The enjoyment of academic freedom carries with it *obligations*, such as the duty to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views, and to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds. [2], emphasis added]

It is for this reason that the campaign focuses on Israeli institutions, and reminds its audience of Judith Butler's injunction that: "our struggles for academic freedom must work in concert with the opposition to state violence, ideological surveillance, and the systematic devastation of everyday life" [3]. The letter calls on academics to

develop a nuanced position on academic freedom if they wish to remain true to their commitment to human rights and their solidarity with the oppressed.

In this regard, the Hebrew University is deeply complicit in Israel's ongoing occupation, colonization and apartheid policies, and in the violation of Palestinian rights. Not only does the Hebrew University Mount Scopus campus extend into occupied land, an act illegal under international law, but it also treats its Palestinian students unequally by not affording them teaching services offered to Jewish students.

The Hebrew University conference boycott campaign took its letter to academics around the globe to gather a base of support from which to then approach the oral history society and potential participants of the conference in Israel. Campaign organizers have sent numerous emails to academics, and spent countless hours explaining the campaign's position that, in Alice Walker's words, "now is not the time" for academic engagement with Israeli institutions. Pushing future conference organizers to choose destinations away from Israel, and ensuring participants do not attend, will need sustained action, and will need to take letter writing to the next step of building networks of support. This campaign offers a model for how we can all sustain our action and put further pressure on international academics and their institutions.

Contact the campaign to add your name at hebrewuconferenceboycott@gmail.com

PACBI

Notes:

[1] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2235>

[2] UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "The Right to Education (Art.13)," December 8, 1999

[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument)

[3] Judith Butler. "Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom." in: *Radical Philosophy*, Vol. 135. pp. 8-17, January/February 2006.

<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/articles/israel-palestine-paradoxes-of-academic-freedom/> (Accessed on December 10, 2011)

The turning of the screw

After years of increasing legal oppression under the Netanyahu regime, during which human rights have been systematically undermined and eradicated, one tends to assume that we may already be at the very trough of this grave offensive, but each week proves we will be driven much deeper, and that new inventions will make last week seem so much nicer. We are now told about a new measure to be imposed against the Palestinian population – a law to forbid calling for prayer by the use of mosque loudspeakers. Nothing serious, really. “There’s no need to be more liberal than Europe”, says Netanyahu, when asked about the planned measure. What is it in comparison to the already existing measures limiting the freedom and activity of most Palestinians?

Indeed, invoking Europe as the icon for liberality is very interesting. While most Europeans would like us to believe that it is the most enlightened of continents, responsible for such marvellous achievements in the arts, sciences and political thinking, it is only natural that some other European achievements are left unclaimed and unheralded. Let us remember Europe for the development of racism, slavery, rampant capitalism, exploitative colonialism, fascism and Nazism, modern genocidal campaigns, two world wars which brought destruction to every corner of the globe... are all these horrors not distinctly European?

In the early 1930s, under the Nazi regime in Germany, Jews were becoming habituated to the daily erosion and removal of their rights, by more and more bizarre legislation. When the laws removed their rights to visit cinemas, theatres and sport facilities, to travel in most trains, study or teach at universities, and later, even the use of park benches, none of those laws and regulations seemingly threatened their life directly. So what, if you cannot sit on park benches, thought some of them, and continued with their daily struggle for survival. Actually, when one is not allowed to use park benches, one’s life may already be over – though one just doesn’t know it yet - as history indeed demonstrated so horribly.

But of course, one can hear the muttering – this is all in the past, gone and buried, never to return again! All this happened a long time ago...

Interestingly enough, there is yet another European ‘achievement’ which some have believed gone forever, but which is still with us. I refer of course to

the Crusades, which for hundreds of years have managed to grip the continent with an iron fist of malignant hatred, with convulsive spasms of violence, an amalgam of racism, religious bigotry, greed, militarism and cultural blindness. Most Europeans would like us not to dwell too closely on this period, especially, as the Crusades were a failure, if one takes their intent as a measure of success. The truth is, however, that the deep islamophobia remained latent, a dormant poison within the European cultural and political self for the past centuries, erupting during the latter part of the 20th century, to become a real force in the first part of the new millennium. If any political force can be said to be on the rise in contemporary Europe, it is certainly the inter-European islamophobia of the political racist Right.

There seems to be hardly a corner of Europe which remains intact of such sentiments and developments. From the north, in Norway, where a crazed racist and anti-Muslim has given vent to his irrationality by killing over eighty people, mostly youngsters in a holiday camp, to Switzerland, which has prohibited the building of mosque minarets, France which has outlawed the Niqab, Holland, where Halal meat was made illegal (but not Kosher meat, which is exactly the same!). In Hungary, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Britain and Germany, the voices of Islamophobia are making the legislatures pass laws and regulations which are increasingly and distinctly anti-Islamic, planned to hurt and humiliate a minority of Muslims, the result of Europe’s colonial and imperial past. The continent is on a grand islamophobic drive, and this is witnessed in many books, articles and studies, but mostly in the large and growing number of murders of Muslims on racist grounds. Only recently, Germany had to admit that police knew of the activities of an ultra-right group of neo-Nazis responsible for eleven such murders over a decade, but has not acted. It seems that the murderers are just enacting through physical violence what the rest of society is enacting through social hatred, alienation and punitive legislation. Europe, it pains one to admit, is sick again, in one of a myriad of such periods in its bloody history. It seems that no amount of credited liberalism can paint over the cracks in the current European polis.

It is also clear that such developments are not isolated from events in the Middle East, and especially from Palestine, which, after all, was the focal point of the Crusades. The policy of all European countries and especially the EU, so clearly favouring Israel and its illegal and brutal occupation of Palestine, should surprise no one with a minimum

of historical knowledge. Israel has (to date) succeeded where the Crusaders have failed. The racist, extreme right in these countries is a mainstay of support of Israeli aggression, and Israeli and Zionist officials are falling over themselves praising such organisations, inviting their leaders to visit Israel, and offering them open support. Sometimes, this may lead to bizarre events, such as when Louis Aliot, husband of French racist and leader of the National Front, Marine Le Pen, has, during his visit of Israel, not only praised the excesses of Zionism, but also claimed that Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's fascist foreign minister, is more extreme than his French counterparts... This slight embarrassment is still worth it, with so many European leaders coming to Israel, such as Geert Wilders recently, to reinforce their anti-islamic credentials. Such politicians are crucial to Israel's success in Europe, its special standing in the EU, the huge sums flowing into Israeli coffers, and also into the PA, helping Israel to finance the excesses of the occupation, by removing much of the direct cost from Israeli responsibility. Such positions, radiating from the extreme right, are now the standard, shared and strongly supported by Sarkozy in France, Cameron in UK, and, until recently, Berlusconi in Italy. There is no credible opposition currently to such policies in Europe. This is one of the main reservoirs in which festers the spirit of the crusades, almost unreformed.

So Netanyahu is quite right. Israel is not more liberal than Europe, but very much an integral part of it, of its Islamophobia, and its myriad of actions against its Muslims. The burning of mosques, not just in the Occupied Territories but all over Israel, is stark evidence to the deep attachment to European political ideals, past and current...

So what, indeed, if one cannot use loudspeakers to call for prayer? Surely life can go on?

Actually, those who do not learn from the history of the Holocaust and other genocides, may in this instant live to regret this slight against human rights, may live to experience much worse and deadly depredations, exactly because they have not fought against each of these measures as they came. It is clear to anyone with eyes to see, that Israel is doing all it can to make life for Palestinians totally unbearable, for the sake of getting rid of them - of every last one of them. The methods they use are unfortunately not new or original, as we can see.

It is generally wrong to make direct and simplistic comparisons between different political structures or eras. One often hears the claim, when anti-BDS people speak against the boycott on Israel, that Israel

is not like South Africa. Yes, this is true. In some instances, it may be even worse. Recently in a Haaretz editorial, one can read about a parallel drawn with the Southern US before the Civil Rights victories. And yes, Israel is not like that, either, but worse, in this instance – there is a wide public acceptance of the anti-Arab, islamophobic, anti-Palestinian sentiment – after all, is Israel not a “Jewish democracy”? So Israel is an animal which one cannot find in the political zoo – it is like South Africa and not like it, it reminds us of the 1950s in the Southern US, but it is definitely different, it does many things like Iran, and it is also not Iran!

So what is it? It is also not like the Third Reich, obviously, but it increasingly uses the methods and language adopted in 1930s Germany. Israel is a unique society, indeed. It is a colonising nation, but with only the colon, and without an imperial, colonial base country; Israel uses apartheid, but bases it not on colour or race, but on nationality and culture; Israel is a Jewish theocracy, denying most rights to non-Jews, yet calls itself a Jewish democracy – an oxymoron, if there ever was one. Israelis are in a quandary – they have never decided, neither would they like to do so now – if they are Jews living in the Middle East in their own tribal theocracy, or Israelis pretending to be modern and democratic. They have also made this most difficult by both considering themselves a “Jewish democracy” and continuing with an aggressive and oppressive military occupation, controlling four million non Jewish Palestinians outside their state, and almost two millions inside. They may wish for a ‘Jewish democracy’ (or what should really be called a Judaic Republic), but surely not with six millions of non-Jews under their iron heel.

What is wrong, deeply wrong, is not to correctly identify the dangers to life and existence in any given moment, when it may be possible to act against these threats. If Israel is using methods which have been used before by extremely cruel and inhumane regimes, it is because it is a cruel and inhumane regime itself, for millions of Palestinians, prisoners of its illegal and vindictive policies. What is also very wrong, is when a whole society, one defining itself as a ‘Jewish democracy’ (as if democracy could have a religious affiliation...) is facing such measures with equanimity and indifference, week after week, as they intensify and multiply. Most Germans in the 1930s reacted in the same manner to the laws and regulations dehumanising Jews, because they did not believe

that Jews were their equals, or should have full human rights. Most Israelis, likewise, do not see Palestinians as their equals, or as people who should have full human or political rights. History has showed to us that once dehumanisation is enshrined in law and social practice, the road to greater and more horrific crimes is open, and the likelihood of such crimes occurring is much increased.

So let us mark the day on which that small and supposedly insignificant infraction of freedom was announced - the right to call for Muslim prayer by the use of mosque loudspeakers. Let us also remember that this was another brutal period, in which Israel has again killed defenceless civilians in Gaza and a prominent Palestinian demonstrator, Mustafa Tamimi, standing up for his right to condemn the continued destruction of his country.

Let us also remind European racists, who also believe in such or worse infractions against Moslems in their own lands, and do not for a moment consider this worthy of note, that if a colonial conquest and subjugation of their country came to a point during which church bells were outlawed, that it is most likely they would also rise against an inhuman and unjustified act of cultural and political brutality. That Israeli Jewish society has been degraded to the point that it seems to need and justify such extreme measures, is certainly not a sign of its great civic resilience and democratic tradition, but of the very opposite – of the corrosive and toxic takeover by undemocratic, racist and inhumane tendencies which have brought death and destruction to so many Europeans, and more than anybody else, to millions of Europe's Jews.

Haim Bresheeth

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Co-author, with Stuart Hood, of *Introducing the Holocaust*, published by Icon Books, 1994 and 2001.

Hasbara arrives at the Edinburgh Fringe

Two BRICUP members, on their annual trip to the Edinburgh Fringe festival, this year inadvertently found themselves exposed to 80 minutes of political theatre of a type that recalled Gideon Levy's figure of speech 'Shoot and Cry' or Ghada Karmi's 'Worried Zionist' category (See Newsletter 67). Their previous experiences of productions by the British physical theatre company 'Theatre ad Infinitum' were excellent - a one man re-telling of

the Odyssey and a moving portrayal of bereavement and loss. This production, "Ballad of the Burning Star", was sponsored by both the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sport and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the umbrella of Bi-Arts, and it had a clear political objective.

The tone of the whole production was set in the opening minutes when 'Star' a nightclub drag performer dressed in an extravagant gold lamé outfit embellished with Stars of David, announced that there may be a terrorist with a bomb in the audience. The *Scotsman* explained that this is "what happens when Jewish people step outside their houses, gather in a public space or do pretty much anything at all: they get blown up. Are you sick of pro-Palestinian drippy liberalism? Well, this vaudevillian cabaret with a glittering Star of David in every corner is here to redress the balance' Throughout the performance, 'Star' was accompanied by a troupe of aggressive and hard faced cabaret dancers in military get-up, who provided a constant background litany of the persecution suffered by Jews down the ages, interspersed with allusions to the death of a specific Jewish child when the bus he was riding was blown up. 'Star' eventually emerged as a former IDF soldier, representing Israel itself, who was haunted by the atrocities he had perpetrated in the Occupied Territories, yet it was only Jewish suffering that was shown, sometimes the direct and intended result of the persecution but sometimes caused by guilt resulting from their own actions against the Palestinian resistance to occupation. The published reviews of the show provide a vivid illustration of the effect that such a distorted view can have on an ill-informed members of the audience.

Of course, there was no reference to the actual reason for Israel's isolation and fear of its neighbours (the murder and dispossession of an indigenous people and theft of their land), to the fact that the Holocaust was a European crime for which the Palestinians are being punished, and almost no reference to the Palestinian suffering inflicted by Israel ever since. The most serious admission was that the Israeli authorities did not collect Palestinian garbage efficiently and allowed settler sewage to contaminate Palestinian villages. The overall result was an extraordinarily unbalanced picture, verging on downright propaganda.

The show was well-reviewed, the *Guardian* giving it 4 stars and the *Scotsman*, 5 stars. Lyn Gardner in the *Guardian* said "The nub of the piece is a compassionate examination of the identity confusion that occurs when the victim becomes occupier and oppressor" Really? The *Scotsman* said, "The story is

a [familiar] cliché but also a tragic truth, and what this piece of provocative razzamatazz does so thrillingly well is separate one from the other” Does it ? A more analytical notice in the LIST found that, while the fusion of dance and cabaret did tell the story of the modern Israeli state, Nir Paldi’s blend of kitsch drag was “ jarring when set against the seriousness of his subject”. The Scotsman went on to state that, in a “poignant finale [...] Paldi’s ‘Star’ is consumed by guilt and hate” but this is most certainly not borne out by the attitudes and voting habits of today’s Israel. What we did see was prolonged Zionist self-pity without any significant appreciation of the situation that the Zionist agenda has created for the Palestinian people.

Questions arise. Ad Infinitum’s Co-Directors, Israeli Nir Paldi and British George Mann, trained together at the Lecoq School of Physical Theatre in Paris and have a long artistic association. But did the British contributors to this British production know that they were supporting such a distorted view of modern Israel? And how did the Israeli government sponsorship arise? Those who peddle this sort of theatre should note that the Israeli state’s support for any cultural or academic enterprise in the UK now causes alarm bells to ring. Certainly they should ring loud in the offices of the Pleasance venue and the Fringe Society. The Fringe Festival has always functioned on the admirable principle of open access for performers. If this openness is now being exploited by governments for propaganda purposes, then it is time that the printed Fringe programme made that support explicit. It was the show’s flyer, handed out at the venue, that revealed the tell-tale logos of the two Israeli ministries - and they needed a magnifying glass and a Hebrew speaker to decipher. Activists in the cultural boycott campaign will look out for any shift in Israeli government policy towards support for non- Israeli companies, which may require a re-think of the current definition of valid targets for boycott. This may extend the potential for valid targets for boycott.

Monica Wusteman & David Pegg

Notices

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk

Letters to the Editor

Please note that we do have a “Letters to the Editor” facility. We urge you to use it. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of the campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month’s newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible. Letters and comments should also be sent to newsletter@bricup.org.uk

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are expensive. We need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands.

Please do consider making a donation .

One-off donations may be made by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at Sort Code 08-92-99
Account Number 65156591
IBAN = GB20 CPBK 0892 9965 1565 91
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If you use the direct funds transfer mechanism please confirm the transaction by sending an explanatory email to treasurer@bricup.org.uk
More details can be obtained at the same address. Like all organisations, while we welcome one-off donations, we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

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