

# BRICUP Newsletter 80

BRICUP

British Committee for the  
Universities of Palestine

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## Open letters for the people in Gaza

In late July, the international medical journal **The Lancet published** two letters at the height of Israel's latest devastation of Gaza. The authors were academics from the UK and Italy (lead author Professor Paola Manduca, University of Genoa).

The first letter is reproduced in full below: the contents speak for themselves. The second letter was written in the light of the all too predictable attacks upon the Lancet and Dr Richard Horton, its editor, as a result of our letter. The campaign

against Dr Horton began immediately and we understand that 2,500 doctors have signed up to an attempt to force Elsevier, the publisher of the Lancet, to fire Dr Horton or else they will organise a boycott of all of Elsevier products, (which includes many other medical journals). These critics appear to hold it against Dr Horton that he initiated the *Lancet Palestine Health Alliance* which continues to actively promote academic work in the health field in the Occupied Territories.

There is a considerable history of attacks on medical journals for publishing pieces critical of Israel, however evidence-based. More than 20 years ago critics in the US were calling on colleagues to boycott the Lancet after they had published reports by a British surgeon Pauline Cutting of her experiences in Beirut under Israeli bombardment and invasion in 1982. Indeed more than two decades ago a medical journal called World Medicine was actually forced to close after UK Jewish doctors pressurised its advertisers on account of a paper in the journal which mentioned the Israeli massacre of Palestinian villagers at Deir Yassin. The British Medical Journal too has come under regular attack, often after publishing articles of mine. After one particular publication in 2004 there were very public calls for the editor to be fired or censored, often coming from prominent Jewish medical academics like Lord Winston. These days the BMJ sends submitted articles on Israel/Palestine to their lawyers. These pressures have long operated as a form of censorship. No US medical journal would ever have published the Lancet letter!

Lastly, it should be noted that those attacking the Lancet letter did not address the evidence to which we pointed. I have found the same thing

over and over again in relation to the Israeli doctors and torture campaign I have been convening since 2009 as part of BRICUP. The critics, many of whom are medical doctors, never produce counter-evidence; merely seek to smear the author and his or her presumed motives. Thus are war crimes whitewashed!

Derek Summerfield,  
Institute of Psychiatry,  
King's College, London.

## The open letter

We are doctors and scientists, who spend our lives developing means to care and protect health and lives. We are also informed people; we teach the ethics of our professions, together with the knowledge and practice of it. We all have worked in and known the situation of Gaza for years. On the basis of our ethics and practice, we are denouncing what we witness in the aggression of Gaza by Israel.

We ask our colleagues, old and young professionals, to denounce this Israeli aggression. We challenge the perversity of a propaganda that justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade a massacre, a so-called “defensive aggression”. In reality it is a ruthless assault of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity. We wish to report the facts as we see them and their implications on the lives of the people.

We are appalled by the military onslaught on civilians in Gaza under the guise of punishing terrorists. This is the third large scale military assault on Gaza since 2008. Each time the death toll is borne mainly by innocent people in Gaza, especially women and children under the unacceptable pretext of Israel eradicating political parties and resistance to the occupation and siege they impose.

This action also terrifies those who are not directly hit, and wounds the soul, mind, and resilience of the young generation. Our condemnation and disgust are further compounded by the denial and prohibition for Gaza to receive external help and supplies to alleviate the dire circumstances.

The blockade on Gaza has tightened further since last year and this has worsened the toll on Gaza's population. In Gaza, people suffer from hunger, thirst, pollution, shortage of medicines, electricity, and any means to get an income, not only by

being bombed and shelled. Power crisis, gasoline shortage, water and food scarcity, sewage outflow and ever decreasing resources are disasters caused directly and indirectly by the siege.

People in Gaza are resisting this aggression because they want a better and normal life and, even while crying in sorrow, pain, and terror, they reject a temporary truce that does not provide a real chance for a better future. A voice under the attacks in Gaza is that of Um Al Ramlawi who speaks for all in Gaza: “They are killing us all anyway—either a slow death by the siege, or a fast one by military attacks. We have nothing left to lose—we must fight for our rights, or die trying.

Gaza has been blockaded by sea and land since 2006. Any individual of Gaza, including fishermen venturing beyond 3 nautical miles from the coast of Gaza, faces being shot by the Israeli Navy. No one from Gaza can leave from the only two checkpoints, Erez or Rafah, without special permission from the Israelis and the Egyptians, which is hard to come by for many, if not impossible. People in Gaza are unable to go abroad to study, work, visit families, or do business. Wounded and sick people cannot leave easily to get specialised treatment outside Gaza. Entries of food and medicines into Gaza have been restricted and many essential items for survival are prohibited. Before the present assault, medical stock items in Gaza were already at an all-time low because of the blockade. They have run out now. Likewise, Gaza is unable to export its produce. Agriculture has been severely impaired by the imposition of a buffer zone, and agricultural products cannot be exported due to the blockade. 80% of Gaza's population is dependent on food rations from the UN.

Much of Gaza's buildings and infrastructure had been destroyed during Operation Cast Lead, 2008-09, and building materials have been blockaded so that schools, homes, and institutions cannot be properly rebuilt. Factories destroyed by bombardment have rarely been rebuilt adding unemployment to destitution.

Despite the difficult conditions, the people of Gaza and their political leaders have recently moved to resolve their conflicts “without arms and harm” through the process of reconciliation between factions, their leadership renouncing titles and positions, so that a unity government can be formed abolishing the divisive factional

politics operating since 2007. This reconciliation, although accepted by many in the international community, was rejected by Israel. The present Israeli attacks stop this chance of political unity between Gaza and the West Bank and single out a part of the Palestinian society by destroying the lives of people of Gaza. Under the pretext of eliminating terrorism, Israel is trying to destroy the growing Palestinian unity. Among other lies, it is stated that civilians in Gaza are hostages of Hamas whereas the truth is that the Gaza Strip is sealed by the Israelis and Egyptians.

Gaza has been bombed continuously for the past 14 days followed now by invasion on land by tanks and thousands of Israeli troops. More than 60 000 civilians from Northern Gaza were ordered to leave their homes. These internally displaced people have nowhere to go since Central and Southern Gaza are also subjected to heavy artillery bombardment. The whole of Gaza is under attack. The only shelters in Gaza are the schools of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), uncertain shelters already targeted during Cast Lead, killing many.

According to Gaza Ministry of Health and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as of July 21, 149 of the 558 killed in Gaza and 1100 of the 3504 wounded are children. Those buried under the rubble are not counted yet. As we write, the BBC reports of the bombing of another hospital, hitting the intensive care unit and operating theatres, with deaths of patients and staff. There are now fears for the main hospital Al Shifa. Moreover, most people are psychologically traumatised in Gaza. Anyone older than 6 years has already lived through their third military assault by Israel.

The massacre in Gaza spares no one, and includes the disabled and sick in hospitals, children playing on the beach or on the roof top, with a large majority of non-combatants. Hospitals, clinics, ambulances, mosques, schools, and press buildings have all been attacked, with thousands of private homes bombed, clearly directing fire to target whole families killing them within their homes, depriving families of their homes by chasing them out a few minutes before destruction. An entire area was destroyed on July 20, leaving thousands of displaced people homeless, beside wounding hundreds and killing at least 70—this is way beyond the purpose of finding tunnels. None of these are military

objectives. These attacks aim to terrorise, wound the soul and the body of the people, and make their life impossible in the future, as well as also demolishing their homes and prohibiting the means to rebuild.

Weaponry known to cause long-term damages on health of the whole population are used; particularly non fragmentation weaponry and hard-head bombs. We witnessed targeted weaponry used indiscriminately and on children and we constantly see that so-called intelligent weapons fail to be precise, unless they are deliberately used to destroy innocent lives. We denounce the myth propagated by Israel that the aggression is done caring about saving civilian lives and children's wellbeing.

Israel's behaviour has insulted our humanity, intelligence, and dignity as well as our professional ethics and efforts. Even those of us who want to go and help are unable to reach Gaza due to the blockade. This “defensive aggression” of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity must be stopped. Additionally, should the use of gas be further confirmed, this is unequivocally a war crime for which, before anything else, high sanctions will have to be taken immediately on Israel with cessation of any trade and collaborative agreements with Europe.

As we write, other massacres and threats to the medical personnel in emergency services and denial of entry for international humanitarian convoys are reported. We as scientists and doctors cannot keep silent while this crime against humanity continues. We urge readers not to be silent too. Gaza trapped under siege, is being killed by one of the world's largest and most sophisticated modern military machines. The land is poisoned by weapon debris, with consequences for future generations. If those of us capable of speaking up fail to do so and take a stand against this war crime, we are also complicit in the destruction of the lives and homes of 1.8 million people in Gaza.

We register with dismay that only 5% of our Israeli academic colleagues signed an appeal to their government to stop the military operation against Gaza. We are tempted to conclude that with the exception of this 5%, the rest of the Israeli academics are complicit in the massacre and destruction of Gaza. We also see the complicity of our countries in Europe and North America in this massacre and the impotence once

again of the international institutions and organisations to stop this massacre.

**Signed on behalf of 24 signatories by Paola Manduca, Iain Chalmers, Derek Summerfield, Mads Gilbert, Swee Ang**

***The Lancet's Response:-** We have received a large number of responses, critical and supportive. We have published 20 letters in print and online reflecting the diversity of this response, together with an editorial exploring Gaza's ongoing conflict from a health and humanitarian perspective. To conclude this exchange, as we usually do, we have given the authors of the original letter an opportunity to reply.*

### **The Authors' reply**

Our Correspondence has prompted supportive as well as opposing responses—some of which have been surprisingly personal, perhaps reflecting the violence of recent events in Gaza. We submit this reply in the spirit of participating in an open and respectful discussion. We welcome the opportunity to address some of the main concerns raised by our critics.

First, we were challenged to declare our competing interests. We declared no conflicts since none of us has any relevant financial interests. We do have experience and affiliations enabling us to support Palestinian civil society and to engage in professional exchange. We hope that most people will read our past work as evidence that we have considerable experience of the situation we described and commented upon.

Second, we have been questioned about allegations that gas might have been used in Gaza. We noted that, “should the use of gas be further confirmed...”. Indeed, before any definitive judgment is made, we believe that the independent Commission of Inquiry set up by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate purported violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws is the best place to test the veracity of these, and other, claims.

Finally, it is worth recalling the context in which we wrote our strongly worded letter. As the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported the day before our letter was published (July 22), “The huge loss of civilian life, alongside credible reports about incidents where civilians or civilian objects (including

homes) have been directly hit by Israeli shelling, in circumstances where there was no rocket fire or armed group activity in the close vicinity, raise concerns about the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law. Specifically, during the preceding 2 days, one Palestinian child was being killed every hour; a hospital was hit by an Israeli air strike killing three people, injuring 40, and destroying the top two floors of the health facility; more than 100 000 people had been displaced from their homes and faced acute shortages of water; the targeting of homes was killing multiple members of the same family (six children aged 3 to 13 years in one family, and three children aged 7 to 11 years in another); and “a request for a humanitarian pause” was “rejected by the Israeli authorities” What we were seeing was an urgent and escalating health and humanitarian crisis. The events that followed have shown that our concerns were justified.

We may respectfully disagree with correspondents on many issues regarding this conflict. But we believe our critics and supporters would all agree that the best way of advancing health, human security, peace, and justice for Palestinians and Israelis alike is through adherence to international law and a positive commitment to negotiation and political solutions to remove what we see as the major causes of this conflict—occupation and blockade.

**Signed on behalf of 24 signatories by Paola Manduca, Iain Chalmers, Derek Summerfield, Mads Gilbert, Swee Ang**

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### **The PACBI Column**

## **Hollywood, Israel and the New McCarthyism**

The Israeli government and its lobby groups around the world have responded to the 2005 Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), including the academic and cultural boycott, with well-oiled propaganda, across-the-board bullying and intense repression. In the west, nothing short of a new wave of McCarthyism is setting in, except this time around the required blind loyalty is to apartheid Israel.

A-list Hollywood stars have begun to criticize Israel, especially its latest war crimes and crimes against humanity in the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip. The latest bombshell,

from [Viggo](#) Mortensen of The Lord of the Rings fame, exposed a seldom talked about atmosphere of vilification and suppression of freedom of expression created by the Israel lobby.

*“If anyone dares express any objection to the Israeli government’s acts of state terrorism against Palestinian civilians, one is rapidly vilified and censored,” said Mortensen in what many agree was an unprecedented, uninhibited moment of truth in the U.S. arts ivory tower.*

As a growing number of Hollywood and music industry celebrities criticize Israel’s crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory, veering off the dogmatic and increasingly tyrannical Israel party line, Israel and its lobby groups are stridently upping the ante in a frenzied attempt to prevent any breach of the thick walls of one of the last -- and most influential -- forts of blind defense of Zionism and Israel’s regime of occupation, settler colonialism and apartheid. With its latest 51-day massacre in Gaza this past summer, Israel seems to have triggered unprecedented vocal opposition among U.S. celebrities, making its McCarthyist war on dissent even harder to win, even if it succeeds in some battles. At the height of Israel’s Gaza onslaught, the Hollywood Reporter [stated](#):

*“[Jon] Stewart, director Jonathan Demme, Tori Amos, Rob Schneider, Kim Kardashian, Mark Ruffalo, Anthony Bourdain, Roger Waters, NBA stars Dwight Howard and Amare Stoudemire, Italy’s goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, D.L. Hughley, Mia Farrow, Whoopi Goldberg, Stephen Hawking and Annie Lennox are among the ... big names who have weighed in with some degree of support for the people of Gaza or outright criticism of the Israeli government.”*

Israel’s response was swift. The so-called Creative Communities for Peace ([CCFP](#)), a well-funded front for the Israel lobby that is tied to the settlement movement, has been working overtime to stifle dissent in Hollywood and rally the star troops to cover up Israel’s egregious crimes in Gaza. In September, CCFP published an [ad in the New York Times](#) with 300 Hollywood names supporting Israel’s aggression in Gaza as “self defense.” The logic driving CCFP is [summarized](#) by one of its founders:

*“If you boycott Israel in art, the next thing is boycotting Israeli manufactured goods, then a boycott of Israel as a tourist destination. Then a boycott of anything that has anything to do with Israel. We have to nip this in the bud.”*

A leader of CCFP, which brings together influential Zionist arts executives and managers with Israeli officials to undermine the growing cultural boycott of Israel, explained the lobby group’s job as using their influence with artists to “make sure they didn’t cancel” scheduled events in Israel. Israel realizes that, despite the still deep complicity of most western governments in its regime of oppression, it is losing the war for hearts and minds all over the world, including in Europe, as has been consistently revealed in authoritative polls of international public opinion.

Despite spending hundreds of millions of dollars over the years on its propaganda programs worldwide, including the so-called “[Brand Israel](#)” campaign which openly uses [culture as propaganda](#) to whitewash Israel’s crimes and show its “prettier face,” particularly after every massacre, Israel, in world public opinion, is [competing with North Korea](#) as the state with the third or fourth lowest popularity. Also in apartheid South Africa, public relations campaigns -- which are largely [plagiarized](#) in Israel’s current propaganda machine -- failed to hinder the spread of international anti-apartheid boycott, divestment and eventually sanctions measures.

The sharp decline in Israel’s global standing can be attributed to several key factors, including the country’s shift in the last few years to the fanatically and overtly racist, far-right end of the spectrum, with the corresponding loss of the last masks of democracy, and the rapid growth of the Palestinian-led, global BDS movement. In response, Israel and its pressure groups have come to rely almost exclusively on their weapons of choice: intimidation, bullying, smearing and outright threats against anyone who dares to step out of line. This is most evident in the United States, where a new air of McCarthyism is hovering over [academic](#) and cultural institutions, as well as corporations, where any criticism of Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights and international law may be voiced. Israel and Zionist groups are trying to paint critics of Zionism or Israeli policies, let alone those endorsing BDS, as not only “anti-Semitic” and “seeking to destroy Israel,” but also as “[un-American](#),” as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has indirectly done when he lashed out at president Obama for condemning Israel’s latest phase of colonizing Palestinian territory.

Unconditional, unquestioning allegiance to Israel, right or wrong, is being imposed as the litmus test of loyalty in this new McCarthyism. Those who

fail the Israel loyalty test are mercilessly attacked, isolated, and may have their careers cut short and their characters assassinated. When the Oscar-winning Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem joined 100 other artists in Spain condemning Israel's crimes in Gaza as "genocide," for instance, some Hollywood industry executives were quick to publicly "[blacklist](#)" Cruz and to swear never to hire her again. Another top Hollywood manager accused Cruz and Bardem of "anti-Semitism," but said he would hire them only if they continue making box-office hits. The escalation of Israel's McCarthyist campaign in the U.S. against celebrity critics betrays the deep level of distress prevailing in Israel and among its influential pressure groups about the shattering of what the late Edward Said called, "the last taboo" in American politics—criticizing Israel and suggesting measures to hold it accountable to international law. But just as the first edition of McCarthyism was defeated through the persistent, courageous and creative efforts of conscientious defenders of freedom and human rights, so can this new McCarthyism.

PACBI

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### **Pro-boycott campaigner has job offer rescinded by the University of Illinois**

Steven Salaita is a well-regarded academic in the field of American Indian Studies and is also a determined supporter of Palestinian rights and of academic boycott in support of achieving these rights. Steven applied for a tenured post at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and, in October 2013, was given a formal offer following an open search process whose recommendation was subsequently approved at all of the appropriate levels. While such appointments at UIUC are subject to final approval by the school's Board of Trustees, Steven was, like all other new appointees, informed that this was a mere formality and accordingly resigned from his tenured post at Virginia Tech and moved his family to Illinois.

However to the surprise and consternation of the faculty, University Chancellor Phyllis Wise declined to submit his name to the trustees for ratification and the job offer was cancelled in August almost a year after the offer was made. This dramatic volte face was prompted by Steven's horrified tweets in reaction to Israel's assault on Gaza. Less than a year earlier in

December 2013 Chancellor Wise had issued a strong statement in [defence of academic freedom](#) 'we value academic freedom as one of our core principles and cherish the critical importance of the ability of faculty to pursue learning, discovery and engagement without regard to political considerations' however that freedom was for those who opposed the academic boycott of Israel. It turned out to be freedom only for those who agreed with Wise.

There has never been any suggestion that Salaita had sought to use his teaching position to censor, mislead or indoctrinate students; rather he has been praised for his encouragement of open debate. He is being punished for exercising the right of free speech on a contentious political issue, the first amendment right that Americans are proud to present as an example to the world.

The initial suspicion was that University donors and alumni who were supporters of Israel had lobbied to get the appointment cancelled. Although the University denied this initially, [evidence is steadily accumulating](#) that such pressure was brought to bear. UIUC is taking extreme measures to [conceal evidence of pressure](#) including claiming documents that are referred to in other papers 'cannot be located'.

In an email of 24 July Wise told UIUC fundraising staff about meeting with someone who appears to be a major donor, 'He said that he knows [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] well and both have less loyalty for Illinois because of their perception of anti-Semitism. He gave me a two-pager [the document that cannot be found] filled with information on Steven Salaita and said how we handle this situation will be very telling.'

One donor wrote to Wise on 24 July saying, 'I was a financial supporter of the BIF [Business Instructional Facility] and Hillel buildings on campus and was proud to have my name on plaques in both of these facilities. Based on the hiring of Mr. Salaita, I have decided to reconsider any future commitment of time and money to the University of Illinois.' He wrote this mail because, 'I have read a brief document on Professor Salaita's views prepared by the Jewish Federation's Israel Education Center'. The Israel Education Center has an explicit policy of intervention in University affairs to promote a pro-Israel agenda and advises students how to counter those who contest Israel's actions.

This politically motivated interference in academic affairs has generated a storm of protest

and action in support of Steven Salaita. Many petitions have been circulated and are still [open for more signatures](#). At the time of writing close to 2000 academics have [signed a declaration](#) that they will not speak at UIUC until they honour their offer to Steven. Eleven departments at UIUC have passed motions of no confidence in Chancellor Wise; the [American Association of University Professors has taken up his case](#); Over 130 members of "[University of Illinois' Jewish Community](#)" have protested; [seven national professional associations have condemned UIUC's actions](#); at least two conferences have cancelled their bookings; [#SupportSalaita](#) continues to get heavy traffic on twitter; and students at UIUC and elsewhere are rallying to his support. On 22 September [Vincente Diaz addressed the faculty senate](#) and spelled out the history of UIUC's treatment of Steven. At the meeting the heads of the 16 departments that had agreed motions of no confidence in the Chancellor, President, and Board of Trustees reaffirmed their positions. Later the University of Illinois [Jewish Studies program condemned Salaita's firing](#).

BRICUP, with our colleagues in AURDIP have [written to Chancellor Wise](#) to express our outrage at his treatment and to express our full support for him and for academic freedom.

Mike Cushman

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## **UK-Palestine Mental Health Network**

The UK-Palestine Mental Health Network was launched at a meeting attended by sixty mental health professionals in April of this year. Two further successful open meetings have been held, clarifying the aims and broadening awareness of the group. Our focus is on raising awareness of the issue of Palestine amongst the UK mental health community. We urge that both individuals and organisations take account of the call by Palestinian civil society that we avoid participating in activities that normalise the Israeli regime. There is a Mental Health Network Facebook page (see below), and a website will be created to further these aims, and as a tool to facilitate communication between Palestinian mental health workers and their UK counterparts. Our first public meeting 'War and Mental Health: focus on Gaza', with Dr Brian Barber, Dr Nimisha Patel and Dr Derek Summerfield, will take place in London on October 10th.

An opportunity to work collaboratively with like-minded colleagues arose with the decision of the European Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapists (EABCT) to hold its 2015 annual conference in Israel. The July edition of the Bricup newsletter included an Open Letter issued by the Mental Health Network presenting arguments against this choice of venue. Later that month members of the British body affiliated to the EABCT, the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapists (BABCT), debated an AGM resolution 'regretting' that decision, and pointing out that delegates' 'attendance at a conference in Jerusalem may be used to promote and or legitimate Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian land'; and that 'the choice of Jerusalem as the host city precludes the attendance of many people including Palestinian mental health professionals from the West Bank and Gaza, EABCT members who support the academic boycott of Israel and others who, by attending would face the disapprobation of their communities.'

As David Raines said when proposing the motion, it was ironic that the choice of venue would bring the conference closer than it had ever been to a population with massive unmet mental health needs, but would inevitably preclude the attendance of the mental health professionals who work with them. The resolution did not call for the Conference to be boycotted. It did, however, urge those considering going to Jerusalem in 2015 to read the Mental Health Network's Open Letter, a statement that sets out in detail the reasons why attending this event would be detrimental to the search for justice and peace in Palestine/Israel.

After a debate the resolution was passed by 45 votes to 2, and one of the British key-note speakers for the 2015 conference announced his intention not to participate. The authors of the resolution have been invited to write an explanatory article for the BABCT magazine CBT Today.

This year's EABCT Conference took place on 12th-13th September in The Hague. Here there were two significant developments. First, the application of the recently formed Palestinian Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapists for membership of the EABCT was approved, and is due to be ratified in March 2015. Second, the issue of the location of next year's conference was again the subject of debate. Following the AGM vote in July, the UK delegation was instructed to read out the Resolution mentioned above, and to announce

that the BABCT would not be sending representatives to the 2015 Conference in Jerusalem.

The Mental Health Network had distributed its Open Letter to all the delegates attending from across the Continent. In the aftermath of the slaughter in Gaza, this perhaps helped crystallize the doubts of many delegates. In a fifty minute debate the Israeli delegation was accused by some representatives of having deceived member organisations about the level and nature of Palestinian endorsement and participation in the Conference. There was a call for the Conference to be cancelled, or postponed until a lasting peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians had been implemented. At the request of the Board this was not put to the vote. There is no doubt that this is now a highly controversial matter within the world of cognitive behavioural therapy, and several psychologists are attempting to raise the issue with colleagues within their professional organisation.

We are aware that protests are also already being made within the membership of World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) regarding the decision to hold their 2016 Conference in Tel Aviv. A poorly argued justification for this was published in WAIMH's summer 2014 Bulletin, and the WAIMH Board too have felt the necessity to justify the decision to their membership. Some country AIMH committees have already balloted their members and others are planning to do so. There has been speculation that the WAIMH Board may announce a decision to change the venue, perhaps to pre-empt a difficult and divisive process within their member organisations.

One conclusion we might draw from this is that there is deep disquiet among mental health workers about the UK's unequivocal support for Israel, who readily discuss and act upon their misgivings when there are opportunities to do so.

The UK-Palestine Mental Health Network.  
[\[ukpalmhn@gmail.com\]](mailto:ukpalmhn@gmail.com)

See:- <https://www.facebook.com/UKPMHN>

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## **Boycotting the Edinburgh Fringe**

*Israeli cultural and academic institutions directly contribute to maintaining, defending or whitewashing the oppression of Palestinians, as Israel deliberately tries to*

*boost its image internationally through academic and cultural collaborations. - BDS movement*

The Edinburgh Fringe Festival is the largest festival of its kind in the world, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors from across the world to Scotland's capital. With thousands of events performing to around two million people the Fringe organisers do not vet shows or performers, instead it provides a platform for artists where "anything goes".

### **But not quite!**

Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) has a long and proud tradition of support for the cultural boycott of Israel, organising protests at events in Edinburgh and across Scotland. Our protests in the past have included demonstrations outside theatres and protests at performances inside venues. In 2012 several performances by the Batsheva dance group were disrupted by protestors inside the hall and in 2008 five protestors were arrested for highlighting, during a performance by the Jerusalem String Quartet, the role of state sponsored cultural groups in whitewashing Israel's human rights abuses. The charges of acting in a racially aggravated manner against the five members of SPSC were thrown out by an Edinburgh court with the judge ridiculing the prosecution attempts to criminalise legitimate protest.

As the premier international arts festival of its kind, the Fringe attracts performers from all over the world, including Israel. In 2014 there were a number of such acts, some regular, some for the first time. Of those only two were funded by the state of Israel. A group of artists, writers, actors and campaigners protested the inclusion in the programme of one show, the Incubator Theatre Company from Jerusalem. The company receives financial support from the Israeli government, making it a campaign target. SPSC set about organising a very high profile campaign aimed at stopping the performances, as well as highlighting the promotion of "Brand Israel" and the role of cultural groups awarded Israeli state sponsorship. As the play was due to run for fully four weeks this was an ambitious objective. When correspondence and meetings with venue managers and Incubator producers proved fruitless, on the opening day around 150 protestors blocked the access to the theatre, forcing the promoters to devise alternative access plans. However the noisy protest also disrupted



shows taking place at neighbouring venues, with promoters of other shows complaining to the producers of the Incubator group. Within hours the promoters announced that the show was being cancelled and that another venue was being sought. But given the scale of the Fringe, no alternative venue could be found and on the first day of a planned 28 day protest, we were successful.

But this wasn't the only "show in town". In another part of the city, in a venue operated by the city council, the Pola Dance company funded by Ben Gurion University was due to perform for four nights. We had already approached the council calling upon them to cancel the show and after the news of the Incubator cancellation, it was announced that the Pola performances were to suffer the same fate. Newspaper reports, quoting the Israeli Foreign Affairs ministry, attacked the Edinburgh Fringe but also claimed that the Scottish Government were assisting in the search for alternative venues. This was denied by the Scottish Government.

The reaction to these two shows being cancelled has been enormous. Thanks to the prestigious nature of the Fringe, the international arts media interest is always high so the cancellation of the shows did not go unnoticed. However coming as it did only weeks before the Scottish Independence referendum, this interest was not confined to the arts media nor to local press. The boycott was reported in arts and current affairs media, both written and broadcast, across the world in recognition of the significance of what had happened. Criticism was levelled at us by some in the arts world for promoting censorship and undermining the ethos of the Fringe, although the fact that two other Israeli Fringe performances that did not have any funding by the state of Israel were ignored by us helped to highlight the cultural boycott criteria, strengthening the grounds for BDS action. Of course, the response of the government was more interesting. Given that the Scottish government and the local council are heavily involved in the promotion of the Fringe, it could be expected that there would be an adverse reaction. When the call for boycott of Fringe events was initially made, the culture minister proclaimed that the Scottish Government was opposed to boycott, signalling tacit support for Israeli state funded events. This suggested that despite claims that the Holyrood government was different from its Westminster counterpart on areas of foreign policy, while reserved to Westminster, their attitude to Israel and BDS was

exactly the same. Given the events taking place at that time in Gaza this was a serious blow to our efforts. However the massive public reaction forced a positive response from Scottish Ministers. Condemning the attacks on Gaza, First Minister Alex Salmond called for an immediate end to UK arms sales to Israel and for a UN led investigation into Israeli war crimes. Later the Scottish government went further and issued formal advice to public purchasers on dealing with companies that may be involved in illegal Israeli settlements. This guidance will be embedded within statutory guidance under the new Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.

*"The Scottish Government strongly discourages trade with companies active in Israeli settlements which are recognised as illegal under international law. The exploitation of assets in illegal settlements by any company is likely to constitute 'grave professional misconduct' for the purposes of procurement legislation. This government expects public sector contractors to maintain high standards of business and professional conduct. The policy note we have issued today underlines that expectation and advises purchasers to seek assurances that any Israeli-based company they consider entering into a contract with, is not in any way involved in illegal settlements. Contracting authorities are also advised to seek assurances that any goods they are looking to procure which originate in Israel have not been produced in illegal settlements."*

Whilst this only goes part of the way to supporting boycott, it is nonetheless significant. For their part, the City of Edinburgh Council rightly sees the Fringe and other festivals as key, not only to the cultural life of the capital, but also to the local economy. It is therefore extremely sensitive to any adverse publicity which the city may attract. So although disappointing it was not all that surprising that it remained silent on our boycott campaign. But given the huge publicity generated by the cancellation of the two shows, Green Party councillors tabled a motion calling for the flying of the Palestinian flag above the council headquarters. The full meeting of the council was addressed by SPSC and the Association of Palestinian Communities in Scotland, following which they voted in favour of the move, with only the Conservative party in opposition. On 1 September, Edinburgh followed the lead shown by Glasgow, Fife, West

Dunbartonshire and Dundee and flew the Palestinian flag in a demonstration of solidarity with Palestinians. Aberdeen City Council confirmed they would once again fly the Palestinian flag on 29th November, UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This followed the decision by Midlothian Council to join West Dunbartonshire, Stirling and Clackmannanshire in endorsing the Palestinian call for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against the state of Israel.

So what do we take from this?

The support of the Israeli state for cultural bodies and events continues apace and if allowed to go unchecked, will succeed in portraying Israel as a modern, pluralistic society, whitewashing Israel's unrestrained colonisation of Palestinian land and their ethnic cleansing and genocidal policies. Our opposition to cultural events is hugely significant in that it shines a spotlight on this policy of normalisation. By forcing the cancellation of events at the Edinburgh Fringe we have gained massive publicity, debate amongst the public, cultural workers and media of the necessity for BDS, and increased support not just for the cultural boycott but for the BDS movement. Our success in Edinburgh, while Palestinians resisted Israel's latest massacres, not only adds to the growing list of successful BDS initiatives across the globe, but has encouraged government bodies to look more closely at how they can respond to public pressure to act.

It is a small but hugely significant step.

Albie O'Neill

Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign

## **Ariel University academics withdraw from London conference**

It is reported by the Middle East Monitor Thursday (September 25, 2014) that two Israeli Ariel University academics who were to have presented papers at the annual conference of the [European Association of Israel Studies](#) (EAIS) were told not to mention their institutional affiliation. Rather than accept that condition, they withdrew and the conference took place at SOAS without them.

According to [a report in the Times Higher Education](#), the conference organisers made this condition because they had decided that the Israelis were welcome to come and present their papers as individual scholars but not as academics representing Ariel University. Ariel would not be recognised as a university "until the status of the Occupied Territories has been decided between the two parties". The organisers added that "this policy is driven by the fact that we don't want to be politicised. We have to sit on a very thin fence and it's often uncomfortable."

At the conference a Tel Aviv professor is reported to have said that since "a scholar is necessarily part of an institution that funds his research and allows him to build a position in the academic world, his participation in an academic event without the possibility to mention his professional affiliation goes against the very logic of the field... To boycott an institution but not its scholars is, somehow, to boycott a building but not those who work in it." The professor should read the PACBI guidelines (see below) which distinguish clearly between individual academics and the policy-making and management structure of academic institutions. Ariel is located on a notorious colony located deep in the Occupied West Bank. It was granted full university status by the Israeli government in 2012. As part of a broader, Palestinian-led Boycott Divestment Sanctions campaign, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) [advocates for a boycott](#) of Israeli academic and cultural institutions.

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## 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](mailto: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](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)

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