

BRICUP Newsletter 47

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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The European Platform for the Academic boycott of Israel (EPACBI) meets in London.

Over the weekend of the 26/27th November, the second annual meeting of EPACBI was held in London. EPACBI was founded a year ago in Paris with the objective of bringing together groups and individuals from across Europe to learn from each other and to coordinate activities.

This year, representatives from France, Holland, Italy, Norway and Sweden joined with a large turnout of BRICUP members for a successful weekend of discussion, during which we exchanged information about the current status of our campaigns. We made plans for the expansion of EPACBI, both within the current member countries and beyond to those not currently involved, and agreed that Technion (The Israel Institute for Technology) should be the common focus for a Europe wide campaign against research collaborations with Israeli institutions. Technion was chosen because of its particularly close involvement in Israeli military research and in the development of other instruments of oppression (surveillance and security technology etc) for use against the Palestinian people.

See the January 2012 newsletter for a fuller report of the meeting and updates on these plans.

Israeli professor imprisoned for refusing duty in the IDF has been fined by his University

Prof. Idan Landau of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has refused reserve IDF duty for the past 11 years. He has been imprisoned three times but on this occasion the University, for the first time, has fined him.

Prof. Landau, who lectures in the linguistics department, has had half of his salary withheld for the week in May during which he was imprisoned. After he was released he made up the instructional time that he had missed. He also claimed that he had continued conducting research while in prison. About 230 senior university lecturers from Israeli institutions of higher learning and about another 100 from abroad are reported to have sent a letter to BGU President Rivka Carmi, calling on her to reconsider the decision to reduce the pay of Prof. Idan Landau. Another 90 faculty members from BGU made a similar demand. The University claims that "Landau was not punished by the university. No sanctions were imposed upon him for his political beliefs or due to any stance on the part of the university regarding his decision not to serve in the reserves. Employees are paid a salary for work [and] since Dr. Landau was in detention, he was not at the disposal of his employer and is therefore not entitled to"

[More information](#)

The PACBI Column.

Consistent UNESCO Accepts Palestine: Time for it to be Consistent on Israeli Occupation, Colonialism and Apartheid.

Palestinians the world over have been encouraged by the overwhelming support from the UNESCO General Conference of Member States for the admission of Palestine as a full member in this key United Nations body. Palestinians are hopeful that this historic decision will pave the way for UNESCO to be a more responsible player in the international community, particularly in upholding international law and UN resolutions concerning Palestinian rights. This is important at a time when Israel and the United States, a staunch supporter of Israeli violations of international law, have taken

punitive action against UNESCO for its daring resolution.

We in the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) take this opportunity to thank UNESCO for its courageous stance on the membership issue. We also want to reiterate to the UNESCO leadership important concerns raised by Palestinian civil society, particularly regarding the lack of clear and decisive UNESCO positions on the devastating effects of Israel's regime of occupation, colonialism, and apartheid, which encroaches on all aspects of Palestinian rights, including education and culture. On several occasions, UNESCO's cooperation with Israel has ignored Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights, thereby serving to cover up those violations, regardless of UNESCO's intentions.

In 2008, PACBI addressed the Secretary-General of UNESCO in an open letter on the occasion of his visit to Israel [1], urging him to implement the UNESCO mission without double standards, and to work towards protecting Palestinian lives and heritage from Israel's colonial and racist policies. We warned that while preserving world heritage sites such as the "White City" of Tel Aviv, UNESCO was expected to explain what role it had played to date, if any, in holding Israel accountable for destroying ancient Palestinian buildings, irreversibly damaging Palestinian landscapes, littering them with illegal colonies and apartheid roads; systematically covering up and/or expropriating historical Islamic and Christian sites that attest to the deep-rooted Arab civilization in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem; and the unethical and illegal use of architecture and archaeology to reinvent the place's history. [2]

Furthermore, UNESCO's lack of a clear and firm position concerning occupied Jerusalem has been a constant concern. We refer, for instance, to an event that took place at UNESCO headquarters one year ago, where the new Director-General convened Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian experts to discuss the UNESCO Action Plan for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem and its Wall, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List since 1981 and on the List of the World Heritage in Danger since 1982. [3]

It is unacceptable to Palestinian civil society that at this event there was absolutely no recognition by the

Director-General of the Old City's occupied status, being at the heart of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967. In fact, the word "occupied" does not occur even once in the news item circulated by UNESCO. By calling on "the participants to assure the international community that the parties concerned with the safeguarding of the Old City of Jerusalem are willing to cooperate," the Secretary-General refused to recognize that the Israeli state has displayed flagrant disregard for international law, as attested to by Israel's ongoing colonization and ethnic cleansing policies in Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

More recently, the Israeli Ministry of Education announced in November 2011 that UNESCO was co-sponsoring with it an international youth conference in occupied East Jerusalem, in clear violation of international law. [4] Decisive action on the part of the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) and the intervention of Palestinian civil society and political figures led to the issuance of a public statement by UNESCO distancing itself from the Israeli conference, and reiterating UNESCO's long-standing position which regards East Jerusalem as an inseparable part of the occupied Palestinian territory. [5] The statement did not, however, address the contested status of West Jerusalem, leaving much to be desired for a firm and unambiguous position by UNESCO on Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, such immediate attention was welcomed by Palestinian civil society, and it is our hope that this marks a new phase in the adoption, by UNESCO, of the provisions of international law concerning Jerusalem.

Additionally, UNESCO, in the past, has been implicated in sponsoring Palestinian-Israeli academic and cultural cooperation projects that equate the oppressor with the oppressed, thus normalizing oppression--something the Organization had notably avoided in the South African struggle for freedom and equal rights. The Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization (IPSO) and joint educational projects, such as graduate programs involving Israeli universities, are among such harmful projects. They cover up Israel's occupation and apartheid, and absolve Israel's academic and cultural institutions from their grave, persistent, and well-documented complicity in planning, justifying or otherwise abetting Israel's violations of human rights and international law. In two letters to UNESCO in 2005 and 2010, PACBI expressed concern about

UNESCO's disregard for the call from Palestinian civil society for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel until Israel upholds international law.

In its 2005 letter, PACBI noted, "normal relations between peoples can only flourish after oppression has ended, not before and not as a prelude to it. From our perspective, the only joint projects that ought to be encouraged in the process of addressing injustice are those that contribute to resisting this injustice. At the very least, any sincere joint project must be fundamentally based on the principle of equality and the rejection of military occupation and racial discrimination. Unfortunately, both essential elements are glaringly missing from the IPSO project description and your endorsement of it. UNESCO's support for IPSO therefore legitimizes the attempt to convey a false perception of the possibility of peaceful coexistence and scientific cooperation despite oppression, rather than promoting all efforts to end this oppression." [6]

In its 2010 letter, PACBI further noted, "joint Palestinian-Israeli projects that claim to be apolitical are the most blatantly politicized since they deliberately disregard the context of colonial oppression and misleadingly imply the possibility of achieving peace without addressing the root causes of conflict... Israeli academic institutions, with which UNESCO is partnering, are implicated in the structures of domination in many ways, both historically and in the present. They bear substantial responsibility for planning, justifying and perpetuating the state's colonial and apartheid policies and the consequent dispossession of the Palestinian people." [7]

It is crucial to mention in this regard that UNESCO played a distinguished and widely commendable role in the struggle against apartheid South Africa, including supporting sanctions and boycotts. UNESCO hosted no less than seven international conferences and seminars addressing a wide range of topics, including "solidarity," "resistance against occupation, oppression and apartheid," "sports boycott," "sanctions against racist South Africa" and the "educational needs of the victims of apartheid." [8]

We take seriously UNESCO's positions because of the strong role that culture, academia and heritage play in any colonial situation. We look forward to a

time when UNESCO adopts a consistent approach toward Israel, and spearheads the movement to impose sanctions on it and impose academic and cultural boycotts -- similar to those applied against apartheid South Africa -- until Israel complies with international law. The blackmailing tactics of the United States and Israel should not intimidate UNESCO. We expect more from the premier international cultural organization.

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Notes:

- [1] <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=91400>
- [2] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=669>
- [3] <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/671>
- [4] http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Mtna/TakeTheLeadership/Conference_Details/overview.htm
- [5] <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2011/unesco-statement-8372#.Tsap5MO8jVZ>
- [6] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=977>
- [7] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1307>
- [8] <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=6849>

A Debate on Cultural Boycott: Methods, Aims and Effectiveness.

In July 2011, PACBI noted that the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) had been invited to perform at the BBC Proms in London. PACBI sent a letter to the organizers stressing "the IPO's complicity in whitewashing Israel's persistent violations of international law and human rights". They mentioned specifically the IPO's services to the Israeli army: "the IPO proudly announces its partnership with the army under a scheme whereby special concerts for Israeli soldiers are organized at their army outposts". PACBI called on the BBC to withdraw its invitation to the IPO ⁽¹⁾ and BRICUP also called for the BBC to cancel the invitation ⁽²⁾. But the concert went ahead on September 1st.

However, the protesters went further than requesting cancellation. They bought over 40 tickets to the concert, gained entry perfectly legitimately and then

protested loudly and repeatedly as described in the September edition of this Newsletter⁽³⁾ and as discussed by Rachel Giora below. The BBC suspended its live transmission on Radio 3. The protesters all left peacefully when requested to do so by security officers and there were no arrests.

This was certainly the most extensively reported UK boycott action against the Israeli treatment of the Palestinian people to date. It was also the most audacious, giving rise to both positive and negative reactions, sometimes of considerable intensity. In this article we present an analysis of some of those reactions by three supporters of the BDS movement against Israel.

Rachel Giora of Tel Aviv University, a leading member of Boycott from Within, started this debate by asking BRICUP whether an action that requires relaxation of principles can be effective. She argued that the demonstration inside the Hall did indeed involve the relaxation of an important principle – the freedom of expression. This is certainly an interesting question: here is Rachel's argument-

Protesting the performance of the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) was a major event, and, in various respects, historical and unprecedented. As a member of the global BDS movement I am taking the liberty here to share my thoughts (for future sake) on a very touchy topic: Is it possible that some of the actions, so carefully crafted, reaching high levels of ingenuity, might have curbed, if not violated freedom of expression? Jonathan Rosenhead has implicitly answered that question in the negative ⁽³⁾ arguing that "there were no interruptions to any of the four concert items". However there were three "interventions". The first was during the Webern when protesters "stood up in their choir seats, holding individual letters spelling out FREE PALESTINE and blended their re-textualised version of Ode to Joy with the Webern composition". Later on, "as the conductor Zubin Mehta raised his baton preparatory to launching the Bruch concerto, a group of four broke into chants of 'Free Free Palestine'" while displaying the Palestinian flag... Then, "as the orchestra started up the Bruch, the strains of 'Free Free Palestine' from the last protestor could still be heard. Finally, as the conductor's baton was raised, six groups "popped up one after the other round the auditorium" chanting slogans that were critical of Israeli policy. Indeed,

at no point was the concert interrupted. Still, freedom of expression was curtailed. The concert was repeatedly disturbed. And although the orchestra kept on playing, it did so “louder” than before it was disturbed, in an attempt to be heard despite the disruptions. We should admit it: we, boycott supporters, violated freedom of expression.

How did we deal with it? One protestor used a line of argument that is used by many Israeli boycott supporters: he was “very hesitant about disrupting a concert in such a hallowed venue” but thought that “voicing a peaceful protest during their concert would be nothing compared to the bombing of innocent civilians and the slow but steady genocide inflicted on the Palestinians by the state of Israel”. I agree. But do we want our actions to be weighed against those of Israel? More importantly, since almost anything pales compared with Israel’s injustices, should we use Israel’s policies to legitimize questionable acts? The fact that Israel conducts criminal practices should not legitimize bending our rules or compromising our principles.

Another protestor said that “this precious talk about the purity of music ignores the toxic nature of Israel’s suppression of the Palestinian people”. I agree, but not because music is pure; even foul music (or disputable ideas or repugnant opinions for that matter) should enjoy freedom of expression.

Another, and maybe the most popular argument, deals with the impact of the protests inside the concert hall. Indeed, it is only thanks to these actions, disturbing the concert, that the BBC stopped its live transmission, allowing, as a result, the protest to enjoy a huge amount of exposure. The news about the protest and its message travelled to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of media channels on every continent: they made public the idea that that “there are things more important than music”. The disruption of the concert was therefore conceived of as very effective, at least in the short run.

But is that right? Can one, trying to bring on justice, be effective without being right? Won’t such actions eventually be counterproductive? We should be very careful not to cross this thin line between being just and unjust, or our acts may end up being dismissed and thus be ineffective. Note that the Palestinians asked us to support their call to the BBC to withdraw its invitation to the IPO, but did not ask us to disrupt the concert. It is commendable that some campaigners, including the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, protested the decision of the BBC outside the hall rather than inside it.

But even inside a concert hall protests can be held without disrupting a concert. Banners can be

displayed during the break, chanting and booing can be practiced during applause; a choir could perform in the foyer and so on. Without being familiar with interior of the Albert Hall I am pretty sure other alternatives could have been considered, which is a crucial point here: It’s not like we didn’t have a choice.¹

According to Jonathan Rosenhead⁽³⁾, the protests were not intended to affect Israeli government policies. Why not? I can understand why one may assume that a single occasional act might look ineffective. But the pressure on Israel is mounting precisely because of the quantity of such single “symbolic” protests: they can be carried out peacefully by citizens everywhere, exerting pressure on Israel to change its policies. Voices about Israel’s international isolation are heard everywhere here in Israel and the “threat of delegitimation” is now so palpable that even “Defence” Minister Ehud Barak can ignore it no longer.²

We, members of the global BDS movement, should not (if possible) relax our principles; nor do we need to. It is not because of protests like this one that the boycott movement is so successful: it is because the Palestinians are SO right. The nonviolent BDS actions against Israel, called for by the Palestinian people, have won the Palestinians a sweeping success. Because of their just call they have won widespread support, leaving Israel so isolated. Let us try to make our support of their call effective in ways that will not challenge their cause.

Mike Cushman has written a response to Rachel that emphasizes the widely and strongly held view that “this was not simply a concert: it was part of a massive and well-funded ‘Brand Israel’ campaign.

Mike writes:-

Rachel asks, “Can one, trying to bring on justice, be effective without being right? Won’t such actions eventually be counterproductive? We should be very

¹ See, for instance, protesting Israeli spokesperson at Wayne State University

mondoweiss.net/2011/11/students-protest-israeli-spokesperson-at-wayne-state-university.html?u

² <http://www.haaretz.com:80/news/diplomacy-defense/barak-current-government-makeup-hinders-likelihood-of-peace-talks-1.326835?localLinksEnabled=false>

careful not to cross this thin line between being just and unjust.” These are important questions and, as Jonathan Rosenhead described ⁽³⁾, they gave rise to much discussion amongst the protestors. The issue that confronted us, which I feel that Rachel does not adequately address, was that this was not simply a concert: it was part of a massive and well-funded ‘Brand Israel’ campaign; an exercise in normalisation; a concert fitted into the Israel Philharmonic’s schedule of morale boosting performances for Israeli army units in the occupied territories.

This was a political event disguised as a concert: a political event that deserved, and got, a vibrant political response. To pose it as crushed crochets versus cracked heads is not the best measure nor is it a question of the direct effect on Netanyahu’s proclivity for demolishing Palestinian homes – if only it were that easy. The Albert Hall disruption was part of a long strategy to raise the salience of Israel’s aggression against Palestinians amongst people in Britain in order to create a political climate here that makes knee-jerk support for Israel less possible for British politicians of all the major parties.

Political, economic and trade support for Israel from Europe and America is an absolute necessity for the continuance of the Zionist project. The London action was part of a pattern of actions across Europe promoted by groups supporting Palestinian rights coordinated through EPACBI and elsewhere. The growing success of these groups in highlighting the realities on the ground in European popular opinion alarms the Israeli government and their think-tanks. They regard it as a major area of struggle and one they think they are steadily losing: in the Albert Hall; outside Ahava; on the quays of Sete.

To cite an analogy: attitudes to Wagner’s music depend upon artistic taste and judgment; attitudes to the use of his music to promote racial exclusivity depend upon moral and political judgment. Action is not determined by the music *per se*, but by the circumstances of its performance and the project that is being supported.

Reflecting upon the IPO protest: the usual suspects among our friends applauded; the usual suspects among our opponents deplored; between these two camps a surprising number of uncommitted people came to a judgment that our intervention, even if unwelcome, was proportionate and appropriate.

It is not enough to provide comfort and encouragement to Palestinians, although clearly we achieved that; it is not enough to provoke discomfort among Israel and its apologists, although we

achieved that as well. It is necessary to produce a discernable, if small, change in the attitude of those Europeans and Americans who are passive and unreflective supporters of Israel; there is evidence we have done that as well.

BDS is a political project of non-violent civil society resistance. It will not always be pretty, even if in this case our choir was extremely musical, but it is necessary.

Jonathan Rosenhead responds by addressing the problem of conflicts between freedoms.

Rachel Giora’s comments on the IPO demonstrations are clearly comradely, and her criticisms of the actions on September 1st in the Albert Hall need to be digested carefully, and responded to in the same positive tone.

First, I would express complete agreement with her refutation of the argument that anything we do in the Albert Hall (or elsewhere) is OK because the Israelis do far worse. That licence to behave, if we choose to, almost as badly as the Israelis, is intellectually and morally degenerate. It is also liable to provide the Israeli state with an obvious advantage in how it represents the legitimacy of BDS actions in the UK and elsewhere.

However Rachel’s view on the IPO protests seems to be based strongly on the idea of the primacy of the right to freedom of expression. But to many people this right is not absolute. Radical forces within the student movement in the UK long ago established a policy of “no platform for racists and fascists”, and that has broadly persisted across the nation’s campuses for the past 20 years. Secondly, UK law does not allow complete freedom of expression, having criminalised incitement to racial hatred since the 1970s.

This does not mean that students, or the law, do not value free expression. What it represents is the recognition that there can be conflicts of principles. This manifests itself at the personal level (eg. to be honest may also be unkind), and at the political level. It seems to me that those who are thinking about more contestational acts in support of BDS do not need simply to ask “would this violate free expression?” and abandon the idea if the answer is “yes”. Rather, if the answer is “yes” then the next question to ask is something like – “is the arguable support for this action based on some other principle(s) sufficient to justify the significance of

the violation we are proposing to the right to free expression?"

The countervailing principle, if there is one, must be to do with the effects of the action being considered on the balance of forces which, for the past 44 or 63 years, has enabled Israel to occupy lands by force of arms and to exclude its expelled or fled population from return. The principle of eroding that ability is a very strong one, which I am sure unites all BDS supporters. Why else are we doing it? It may make us feel better to do something, and BDS is something which we can do. But if we did not feel that by our actions and those of others round the world we are weakening Israel's ability to go on saying 'No', then few of us would be as active as we are.

Rachel's alternatives to the Albert Hall action (banners during the break; chanting during the applause) would have been largely ineffective. The target of the action was never formulated as the 5000 people in the hall – it was the radio audience of millions. To that audience such protest would have been both invisible and inaudible. I doubt that the residual local impact would have justified the effort needed to bring it off.

So it comes down to a calculation, simple but complex. Do our methods of pursuing BDS violate undoubted rights (to free expression, to conduct business...) to extents which seem excessive relative to their likely impact (inevitably over the longer term) on the maintenance of Israel's settler and apartheid form of state. That impact will not be direct – that is, the Israeli government will not say, "Oh dear, cultural BDS is too strong for us, so we will evacuate the West Bank". The impact will operate through the purchasing decisions of individuals, the investment decisions of companies, and eventually the calculations of political realities by our local and national representatives.

Rachel says "the boycott movement is so successful [...] because the Palestinians are SO right". I would put it another way. It is because the Palestinians are SO right that BDS supporters are willing to go the extra mile. The success or otherwise of the movement depends however not on the rightness of the Palestinian cause, but on our ability to appropriately divine the opportunities for and limitations on our actions if we wish to serve that cause effectively.

This is very much not to say that the Albert Hall demonstrators got the balance of conflicting principles right. When we get it wrong, it shows up in the negative public reactions to our efforts. This particular action provoked extraordinary enthusiasm

among supporters of the cause, and outrage among some (apolitical, or pro-Israeli) music lovers. We don't yet know how it has played with other sections of the listening and media reading public round the world. We do know it reached them in unprecedented numbers for a BDS action. We don't yet know how far it will encourage other BDS groups to execute comparably bold manifestations. We need to go on observing and thinking about this, and to be ready as a result to adapt our tactics and strategies if it seems appropriate.

It is clear that the detail of the protest inside the Royal Albert Hall on September 1st was not arrived at casually: there was a great deal of detailed and careful discussion. In their contributions to this Newsletter Mike and Jonathan have presented distinct arguments that tend to support the action that was taken: that the concert was an Israeli rebranding exercise that called for and got a vibrant political response; that freedom of expression is not absolute but may be overridden when it conflicts with other and more important freedoms. I would go further and argue that the concept of freedom of expression simply does not apply to musical performances, the purpose of which is entertainment, not the communication of ideas and political actions. Certainly there is also a right to enjoy music undisturbed but that right is far less insistent than freedom of speech or the freedom of the Palestinian people to enjoy basic human rights. To override the right to quiet enjoyment of music is not automatically wrong: sometimes it is a necessary consequence of the relative importance of the two rights.

Another crucial questions that has been considered here is, "Who are the protesters trying to reach?" I take it that nobody was expecting this action to convince the audience of 5000 ticket-purchasing music-lovers! Jonathan focussed on the huge radio audience; Mike focused on the unreflective European and American supporters of Israel. Those are all fine but for me the ultimate target was the BBC and, as Rachel has said, the Israeli Government and the people who elect it.

Newsletter editor (David Pegg),

Sources and Notes.

- 1] <http://www.pacbi.org/and>
- 2] www.bricup.org.uk See Newsletter 43
- 3] www.bricup.org.uk See Newsletter 44

Rachel' response

Needless to say I agree with Mike that “BDS is a political project of non-violent civil society resistance ...” which “is necessary”. This is where I come from. Like Mike, I also view the concert as a “political event” and thus boycottable. And even if viewed as purely entertaining, which it is not, clearly it is boycottable. These, however, are not the issues here. The question is not whether the concert should have been protested but **how** we should protest such events.

I also agree with Jonathan that freedom of expression has boundaries; incitement is one of them. But as much as the concert has been part of rebranding Israel etc., incitement it was not. So, it all boils down to the question: what are **our** boundaries? Is obstruction of freedom of expression one of them? How can we practice non-violent civil society resistance without compromising our principles and without compromising our aim at being effective? I suspect that Jonathan’s suggestion that we should weigh violation of one freedom against a more justifiable principle is problematic; this is how “Security” and “anti-Semitism” are often used in Israel and elsewhere to wipe out any kind of freedom. Recall how Dror Feiler and Gunilla Sköld-Feiler’s *Snow White and The Madness of Truth* - an installation art - was tempered with by the Israeli ambassador to Sweden because, according to him, it was “anti-Semitic”.³

Despite the poverty of my alternative suggestions for the actions taken inside Albert hall, I do hope, both for moral and practical reasons, that we can practice BDS in ways that travel fast but do not infringe on other freedoms. Otherwise we legitimize silencing us.

Boycott Apartheid in the Name of Love!

The following Open Letter is from the Palestinian Students’ Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel to Mireille Mathieu.

Dear Mireille Mathieu,

We are a group of artists, musicians and singers from Gaza. It has come to our knowledge that you have plans to perform in Apartheid Israel! This has come to us as a surprise, given your anti-war positions, and music dedicated to confronting the

kind of aggression that we Palestinians live day in day out under the military occupation of the 4th most powerful military in the world. You once sang about your lament of soldiers going to war, ‘In line, soldiers of love’ calling on them to, ‘leave in the name of love’. Yet you plan to entertain the Israeli armed forces that control, limit and demean our very existence, many of whom will be in the crowd for whom you intend to perform. Right now Israeli soldiers are committing with impunity all manner of well documented war crimes against us, the indigenous population of Palestine.

We are calling on you now to heed our call to boycott the only apartheid regime in the world that maintains our imprisonment. [1] In what mainstream Human Rights Organizations have called the largest open air prison in modern history we tell you that Israel’s five-year blockade, 63 years of dispossession and ethnic cleansing must come to an end. Until then we rely on people of conscience, including artists and musicians, to take a stand and refuse to perform there.

You are known as a compassionate person who came through poverty and hardship; your own mother was a refugee. Imagine then life for us in Gaza! Over two thirds of us are UN registered refugees, ethnically cleansed from our homes by the nascent Israeli army in 1948 to live the rest of our life in the Gaza concentration camp. Millions more refugees, living in exile, remain denied their right to return home to see their loved ones thanks to Israel’s policy of restriction of our movement and its refusal to abide by international law.

The four-year long ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip, where we live, has made our existence even more intolerable, cutting off the main life-line of goods and people coming into Gaza, resulting in severe shortages of food supplies, basic goods and importantly items like cement which is vital to rebuild the 17000+ homes that have been destroyed by Israeli attacks. Injured and ill people are not allowed to travel abroad to receive all manner of medical treatment unavailable in Gaza: consequently over 600 sick patients have died because they had no solution but to stay in the besieged Gaza Strip where they spent their dying days, to the despair of their families. For us musicians, with our heritage of music and dance that we love to play, the Israeli siege denies us instruments, the possibility of receiving international performances and taking our music abroad. Israel’s air, land and sea blockade of all our borders has meant that for years musical instruments were banned from entry to Gaza [2]

³ See the case of Dror Feiler and Gunilla Sköld-Feiler’s [Snow White and The Madness of Truth](#)

In addition to this barbaric siege, in the winter of 2008-9, Israel attacked Gaza, committing war crimes and human rights violations against a population of which over half, an estimated 800.000, are children. During this merciless 23-day assault, 1,417 people were killed including hundreds of children, with over 5500 injured. These heinous crimes have been recounted in detail in the United Nations Goldstone report. [3]

In the face of an international conspiracy of silence, Palestinian Civil Society, almost unanimously, called for international artists to refuse to perform in Israel as part of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign which is a non-violent method of holding Israel accountable to standards of equality and human rights that modern nations are accustomed to. Your performance in Israel would be a rejection of that appeal endorsed by the Global BDS movement. This includes hundreds of your fans who are fighting for justice for the Palestinian people through the BDS campaign. The BDS call is also endorsed by many South African anti-apartheid heroes such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who described as ‘unconscionable’ [4] the prospect of the South African ‘Cape Town Opera’ performing in Israel earlier this year.

A host of internationally renowned musicians have already joined this call by refusing to perform in Israel including Carlos Santana, Annie Lennox, Faithless, Elvis Costello, the Pixies, Gil Scott Heron, Massive Attack, Leftfield, Gorillaz Sound System, Bono, Snoop Dogg, Jean Luc Godard, Devendra Banhart, Faithless, the Pixies and Devendra Bernhart. Roger Waters of Pink Foyd, another 60s icon dedicated to opposing war and oppression wrote a letter announcing his support of a cultural boycott of Israel. He said that in his view,

“..the abhorrent and draconian control that Israel wields over the besieged Palestinians in Gaza, and the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, coupled with its denial of the rights of refugees to return to their homes in Israel, demands that fair minded people around the world support the Palestinians in their civil, nonviolent resistance.” [5]

We ask you to join their fight, our fight for basic human rights, equality and justice. It is time for the world to take real action to stop Israel's war crimes against children, women and men; it is time for conscientious individuals to stand on the right side of history by refusing to condone the war crimes of the Israeli state.

We Palestinian musicians, singers and artists here in the Gaza ghetto dearly hope that one day we will have all the rights denied to us that any musician

would expect, that is all we ask for. We will not be amongst the audience that will attend your concert in Tel Aviv!

We urge you to heed the Palestinian call for a boycott of apartheid Israel until it abides by International law; we call on you to stand on the right side of history and refrain from entertaining a regime that has committed and continues to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. Will you reconsider?!

Signed by 70 musicians

Notes:

[1] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>

[2] <http://www.gazagateway.org/tag/musical-instruments/>

[3] http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/MediaSummaryReport_English.doc

[4] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2010/oct/27/desmond-tutu-opera-boycott-israel>

[5] <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2011/waters-endorses-5484#.TsRUWsMr2so>

Cultural boycott - with a twist

The artist Robert Ballagh, the set designer for Riverdance, opposed its performance in Israel until and unless Israeli apartheid policies against the Palestinians are ended. But despite his opposition the performance went ahead. In response Ballagh is now reported to have donated all royalties from the performance of Riverdance in Israel to the Irish “Ship to Gaza” campaign. The vessel, the MV Saoirse, attempted to sail to Gaza in June of this year but its journey was aborted when its propeller shaft was sabotaged while at port in Turkey. It is now repaired and the Riverdance money will be used to buy fuel needed for the MV Saoirse to make its journey to Gaza. It is a notable irony that those who paid to see the show in Israel are now helping to breach the immoral Israeli blockade. This underlines the effectiveness of BDS - boycott, divestment, sanctions – as a powerful means by which civil society can demonstrate its solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Material from James O'Shea,
Irish Central Staff Writer.

[Read his full report](#)

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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.

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