

Dear Joel and Ethan Coen:

We understand that you're among this year's winners of a \$1mn Dan David prize, awarded jointly by the Dan David Foundation and Tel Aviv University. We read that you're likely to attend the award ceremony in Israel on May 15, in the company of Israeli president Shimon Peres.

All this may seem unexceptional to you. But we think you're too smart not to understand that nothing in this situation is simple. The Dan David judges apparently like your ability 'to tell a simple story in a complex manner'. Allow us to complicate your reported acceptance of this prize.

Your much-celebrated presence will adorn a colonial settler state still vigorously engaged in the business of dispossessing and driving out the indigenous inhabitants, who are the Palestinians. Of course the United States itself is built on the bones and demolished civilizations of its own indigenous inhabitants, but for the Palestinians the struggle is real and present – an every day battle to hang on to land, houses, livelihoods, hopes and ambitions.

Your appearance in Israel will unfortunately help camouflage the brutal realities of a powerful and illegal military occupation. However much you believe you can go there simply as artists, your presence will be spun to reassure the Israeli public that their ruthless colonial society is 'normal', and to promote Brand Israel abroad. You will be saying, to Israelis and to the world, that Israel's violently racist treatment of the Palestinians is acceptable. Do you really want to do this?

Palestinian civil society organisations, grouped together as [PACBI](#), are asking international artists not to go to Israel while it flouts international law and denies Palestinian rights. In the last few weeks, musicians Roger Waters and Pete Seeger have announced their support for this boycott call; they join film directors Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, writers John Berger and Arundhati Roy, musicians Massive Attack, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott-Heron, The Pixies, and many others.

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You may reject the idea of 'taking a stand' like this; you may feel it's antithetical to the whole spirit and ethos of your writing and film-making. But by accepting the prize and going to Israel, you are already taking a stand.

Boycott is a non-violent form of direct action. It gives citizens the power to act in favour of justice when our governments fail to do so. Is it conceivable that during the long struggle against apartheid South Africa, you would have travelled there to receive an award from an apartheid institution? If it isn't, you're already willing to boycott an unjust system.

Right now a group of Israelis organising as [*Boycott! Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within*](#) are threatened with legal sanctions by an anti-boycott bill that has just passed its first reading in the Israeli parliament. You could maybe stand with them. Or with [these Palestinian children](#), woken from sleep by an Israeli army unit and photographed because, apparently, they represent a threat to the state. Or with 11 year old Kareem Tamimi, arrested in January in the chilling circumstances of [this video](#).

But if you go to Tel Aviv and accept the prize, you'll be standing with Shimon Peres, *capo dei capi* of the security forces whose activities one gets a glimpse of in these clips. Won't it make you queasy to do so? We think it ought to. Please don't go.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Haim Bresheeth
Mike Cushman
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead

London, 10 March 2011