

ALERT: Tell Amnesty International that Entertaining Apartheid Israel Deserves No Amnesty!

ISSUED BY: *The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel* ([PACBI](#)), *Adalah-NY: The Coalition for Justice in the Middle East*, [Boycott! Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within](#) (Israel), *British Committee for the Universities of Palestine* ([BRICUP](#)), [International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network](#), [Jews Against the Occupation-NYC](#), [Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods](#) (UK), *New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel* ([NYCBI](#)), [New York City Labor Against the War](#), [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#) (UK), [US Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel](#)

August 5, 2009

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) and groups around the world have been calling for months for musician Leonard Cohen to cancel his planned September concert in Israel. With the international community failing to take action to stop Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people, and inspired by the international boycott movement that helped bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, Palestinian civil society has launched calls for [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions \(BDS\)](#) against Israel, including an academic and cultural boycott of Israel. Ninety-three artists, writers and other cultural workers have [signed onto](#) the Palestinian cultural boycott call. Many dignitaries signed the ["No Reason to Celebrate" pledge](#) and refused to participate in any artistic or literary event during Israel's year-long 60th anniversary celebrations.

Feeling the heat of the protests, Cohen and his PR staff tried to schedule a small concert in Ramallah to "balance" his concert in Israel. However, Palestinians rejected the Ramallah concert and any claimed symmetry between the occupying power and the people under occupation.

Now Cohen and his PR staff are trying to whitewash the concert in Israel by using Amnesty International USA's good name. According to [a July 28th article](#) in the *Jerusalem Post*, Amnesty International USA will serve as sponsor of a new fund. The fund will launder the money raised at Cohen's concert in Israel by using it to finance programs for "peace."

In response, sixteen groups and coalitions issued a July 30th [Open Letter to Amnesty International](#) calling on Amnesty to be true to its values and immediately withdraw support for Leonard Cohen's ill-conceived concert in Israel. The groups noted that by supporting Cohen's concert, Amnesty International is undermining a successful effort by Palestinian and international civil society to end Israel's occupation and other violations of international law and human rights principles. Amnesty International also is partnering in the initiative with Israeli institutions that undermine peace, including a bank directly involved in supporting Israeli

settlement construction. The only alleged Palestinian partner has announced it is not taking part.

TAKE ACTION

Please email Amnesty International, calling on Amnesty to withdraw from support for Cohen's concert. Amnesty International is recognized by many as defending human rights worldwide, so please be respectful and courteous in your message.

You can write and email your own letter, or use the sample letter below and email it, or send an editable form letter via the website of the New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel: <http://boycottisraelnyc.org/category/629/tell-amnesty-international-entertaining-apartheid-israel-deserves-no-amnesty> Further below, for reference, is the full Open Letter to Amnesty International.

-If you send your own email, please email your letter to:

lcox@aiusa.org, cgoering@aiusa.org, ZJanmohamed@aiusa.org,
ikh@amnesty.org, ccordone@amnesty.org, msmart@amnesty.org,
drovera@amnesty.org

(Larry Cox, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA; Curt Goering, Senior Deputy Executive Director of Amnesty International USA; Zahir Janmohamed, Advocacy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International USA; Irene Khan, Amnesty International Secretary General; Claudio Cordone, Amnesty International (UK) Senior Director, Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International (UK) Middle East Director, Research and Regional Programs; Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International (UK) Researcher on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories)

-If you email your own letter, please cc it to:

noamnesty4israeliapartheid@gmail.com so that we can keep track of the responses.

SAMPLE LETTER TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Dear Amnesty International,

I hold Amnesty International's worldwide work for human rights and international law in high esteem. For this reason, I was very troubled to learn that Amnesty International has agreed to manage a fund that will disburse the proceeds from Leonard Cohen's planned concert in Israel in September. I call on Amnesty International to be true to your values, distance yourself from efforts to normalize Israel's occupation and apartheid, and immediately withdraw support for Leonard Cohen's ill-conceived concert in Israel.

By supporting Cohen's concert, Amnesty International will be subverting the worldwide movement to boycott Israel, a non-violent, effective effort by Palestinian and international civil society to end Israel's violations of international law and human rights principles. Accepting funds from the proceeds of Cohen's concert in Israel is the equivalent of Amnesty accepting tainted funds from a concert in Sun City in apartheid South Africa.

Ninety-three artists, writers and other cultural workers have [signed onto](#) the Palestinian cultural boycott call. Many dignitaries signed the "[No Reason to Celebrate](#)" [pledge](#) and refused to participate in any artistic or literary event during Israel's year-long 60th anniversary celebrations.

In his protest resignation from Amnesty International over this issue, Irish author and composer, Raymond Deane, wrote:

"By assisting Cohen in his ruse to bypass this boycott, Amnesty International is in fact taking a political stance, in violation of the premise of political neutrality with which it so regularly justifies its failure to side unambiguously with the oppressed. Amnesty is telling us: resistance is futile, the voice of the oppressed is irrelevant, international humanitarian law is a luxury."

Furthermore, the Israeli partners in the concert, the Peres Center for Peace and Israel Discount Bank, actively hinder efforts to achieve a just peace. A columnist in Israel's *Ha'aretz Daily* called the Peres Center for Peace [patronizing and colonial](#) organization that is in the business of training "the Palestinian population to accept its inferiority and prepare it to survive under the arbitrary constraints imposed by Israel." According to research by Who Profits, a project of Israel's Coalition of Women for Peace, Israel Discount Bank is deeply involved in supporting Israel's settlement enterprise. Israeli settlements violate the very tenets of international law that Amnesty International works to uphold.

Finally, the only Palestinian organization falsely reported in the July 28th *Jerusalem Post* article as being a partner in this project, the Palestinian Happy Child Center, has confirmed that it is not taking part. There is no Palestinian organization participating in this whitewash.

Thank you for your attention to this vital human rights issue. I look forward to learning of Amnesty International's withdrawal of its support for the Leonard Cohen concert in Israel.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your city and country of residence

Entertaining Apartheid Israel Deserves No Amnesty!

Open Letter to Amnesty International

July 30, 2009

In May, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) [called on singer/songwriter Leonard Cohen](#) to heed the [Palestinian call](#) for a cultural boycott of Israel and avoid complicity with Israel's violations of international law by cancelling his planned September concert in Israel, particularly in view of Israel's war crimes in Gaza earlier this year. Sadly, according to [a July 28 article](#) in the *Jerusalem Post*, Amnesty International USA has agreed to cooperate with Cohen in dealing with Israel on the basis of business as usual. Amnesty International USA will serve as sponsor of a new fund that will whitewash the money raised at Cohen's concert in Israel by using it to finance programs for "peace." Being one of the world's strongest proponents of human rights and international law, you shall thus be subverting a non-violent, effective effort by Palestinian and international civil society to end Israel's violations of international law and human rights principles. We call on you to be true to your values and immediately withdraw support for Leonard Cohen's ill-conceived concert in Israel.

The Jerusalem Post report indicates that Cohen and his PR staff, having been criticized for trying to normalize Israel's occupation and apartheid, are trying to whitewash the concert in Israel by using Amnesty International USA's good name. According to the article, "All of the net proceeds from Leonard Cohen's September 24 concert at Ramat Gan Stadium will be earmarked for a newly established fund to benefit Israeli and Palestinian organizations that are working toward conciliation," and the fund will be "sponsored by Amnesty." Curt Goering, the senior deputy executive director of Amnesty International USA, told *the Post*, "We saw this as an exciting opportunity with potential to recognize, support and pay tribute to the Israelis and Palestinians who have been working for peace and human rights amid a difficult environment and insurmountable odds. I see our participation as complementary to what we do, even though this initiative is different from Amnesty's ongoing work."

WHY WE ARE CALLING ON AMNESTY TO WITHDRAW FROM THE PROJECT

By supporting Cohen's concert in Israel, Amnesty International is actively undermining a particularly successful effort by Palestinian and international civil society to end Israel's occupation and other violations of international law and human rights principles. We find this position by Amnesty particularly frustrating

and puzzling given your [call for an arms embargo against Israel](#) following its atrocities in Gaza earlier this year, which your organization described as constituting war crimes.

Accepting funds from the proceeds of Cohen's concert in Israel is the equivalent of Amnesty accepting funds from a concert in Sun City in apartheid South Africa. Profits earned through violations of human rights and international law are tainted and should not be accepted by any morally consistent human rights organization, particularly when this money is intended to be used to whitewash the very violations behind those profits.

Furthermore, your Israeli partners in this venture actively hinder efforts to achieve a just peace. The Peres Center for Peace, with its multi-million dollar annual budget and [fifteen million dollar building](#), is listed incongruously by the Jerusalem Post as both a beneficiary of the fund and a member of the new fund's Board of Trustees. The Peres Center [has been denounced](#) by leading Palestinian civil society organizations for promoting joint Palestinian-Israeli projects that are "neither effective in bringing about reconciliation, nor desirable" and that enhance "Israeli institutional reputation and legitimacy, without restoring justice to Palestinians, in the face of continued Israeli Government violations of international law and fundamental Palestinian human rights, including breaches of the Geneva Conventions." A columnist in Israel's Haaretz Daily called the Peres Center [patronizing and colonial](#), explaining that "Efforts are being made to train the Palestinian population to accept its inferiority and prepare it to survive under the arbitrary constraints imposed by Israel, to guarantee the ethnic superiority of the Jews."

Your other indirect partner in this project, according to the Jerusalem Post, is Israel Discount Bank, a key sponsor of the Cohen concert. Who Profits, a project of Israel's Coalition of Women for Peace, [reports that](#) Israel Discount Bank has branches in the settlements of Beitar Illit and Maale Adumim, has financed construction in the settlements of Har Homa, Beitar Illit and Maale Adumim, and is a major shareholder in a factory in a settlement. Amnesty hardly needs any reminder that all Israeli colonial settlements built on occupied Palestinian territory are not only illegal under international law but are considered war crimes in the Fourth Geneva Convention. Your intention to indirectly partner with a bank that profits from the occupation and to oversee a fund that uses some of that legally and morally stained money contradicts Amnesty's founding principles and commitment to human rights.

The latest attempt by the Cohen team to find an alternative Palestinian fig leaf has also failed. The only Palestinian organization falsely reported in the Jerusalem Post article as being a partner in this project, the Palestinian Happy Child Center, has confirmed that it is not taking part. There is no Palestinian organization participating in this whitewash.

BACKGROUND ON THE BOYCOTT

With the international community failing to take action to stop Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people, and inspired by the international boycott movement that helped bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, Palestinian civil society has launched calls for [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions \(BDS\)](#) against Israel, including an academic and cultural boycott of Israel. Endorsed by [nearly sixty Palestinian cultural and civil society organizations](#) and inspired by the South African anti-apartheid boycotts, [PACBI calls](#) on “the international community to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel’s occupation, colonization and system of apartheid.” These Palestinian calls have inspired a growing international boycott movement which gained added momentum following Israel’s assault on Gaza last winter.

In April, the [British Committee for the Universities of Palestine \(BRICUP\)](#) and [over 100 Israelis](#) called on Leonard Cohen to cancel his planned September concert in Israel. Protests against Cohen’s plans to play in Israel were then held at Cohen’s concerts in [New York](#), [Boston](#), Ottawa and [Belfast](#), among other cities. Feeling the rising heat of the protests, Cohen tried to schedule a small concert in Ramallah to “balance” his concert in Israel. However, Palestinians rejected the Ramallah concert. The Palestinian group that was supposed to host the Ramallah event cancelled its invitation to Mr. Cohen after realizing the adverse effects this would have on the boycott movement, which is widely supported by Palestinians. Reflecting the general mood in Palestinian society against any claimed symmetry between the occupying power and the people under occupation, a July 12 [PACBI statement](#) explained, “Ramallah will not receive Cohen as long as he is intent on whitewashing Israel’s colonial apartheid regime by performing in Israel. PACBI has always rejected any attempt to ‘balance’ concerts or other artistic events in Israel--conscious acts of complicity in Israel’s violation of international law and human rights--with token events in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

For all the above reasons, we strongly urge you to distance Amnesty International from this discredited project and its tainted money.

Signed:

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), [Adalah-NY: The Coalition for Justice in the Middle East](#), [The Alternative Information Center \(AIC\)](#), [American Jews for a Just Peace \(US\)](#), [Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine \(UK\)](#), [Boycott! Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within \(Israel\)](#), [British Committee for the Universities of Palestine \(BRICUP\)](#), [Independent Jewish Voices \(Canada\)](#), [International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network](#), [Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#), [Jews Against the Occupation-NYC](#), [Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods \(UK\)](#), [New York Campaign](#)

for the Boycott of Israel ([NYCBI](#)), [New York City Labor Against the War](#), [Palestine Solidarity Campaign \(UK\)](#), [US Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel](#)

Cc:

- Larry Cox, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA
- Curt Goering, Senior Deputy Executive Director of Amnesty International USA
- Zahir Janmohamed, Advocacy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International USA
- Colm Ó Cuanacháin, Amnesty International (UK) Senior Director, Campaigns
- Claudio Cordone, Amnesty International (UK) Senior Director, Research and Regional Programs
- Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International (UK) Researcher on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories