

22 March 2011

Dear Sir Bob,

I understand from a report in the Jewish Chronicle (21 March 2011) that you are accepting an honorary degree from Ben Gurion University in Israel in May.

Your name is associated with campaigns to make the world – particularly the non-Western world – a better place.

But Israel – adopting nineteenth century European colonial attitudes of civilizational superiority over ‘Asian barbarism’ – was founded on the dispossession of the Palestinians. Since 1948, Israel has been justifiably censured in more UN resolutions than any other state.

Ben Gurion University, where you will accept your not-so-honorable degree, is not a progressive force in an Israel that has otherwise lost its way. Instead, this academic institution is heavily implicated in ongoing violations of international law and human rights, and the world’s longest-running military occupation.

During the widely-condemned Operation Cast Lead (Dec 2008-Jan 2009), the Israeli army (the IDF) massacred with state-of-the-art weapons more than a thousand largely defenceless Palestinians, most of them civilians already living under a cruel siege in the the world’s largest open air prison (Gaza). The impeccable Judge Goldstone found, under the auspices of the UN, that Israel should be investigated for war crimes. But Ben Gurion University actually outdid other Israeli universities in its *support* for the soldiers who helped carry out these atrocities. Ben Gurion gave a special grant of NIS 180 (around 35 Euros) per day, to students who did reserve duty during the slaughter.

This should be no surprise, given that although Ben Gurion was not given the tender, it claimed to have originated the idea in 2008 of a school for military medicine, designed specifically to train medical staff for the Israeli armed forces. Indeed, Ben Gurion complained when the tender was awarded to the Hebrew University . It has also been the case for some time that Ben Gurion, like other Israeli universities, routinely offers special privileges to the Israeli military. For example, as part of their training, military pilots receive a BA from Ben Gurion University in the course of a single year (instead of the normal three years).

And whereas it is hard to imagine the work of Sir Bob Geldof without thinking of the importance of the freedom to engage in political activism, Ben Gurion University has played its part in stifling dissent on campus at crucial moments. While the world demonstrated in horror at the massacre in Gaza, Ben Gurion’s security guards were

Please reply to: BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London WC1N3XX
email: bricup@bricup.org.uk
www.bricup.org.uk

busy photographing and monitoring political activists, and put in place unreasonable obstacles to activism, even preventing students from mounting legal political demonstrations and activities.

I write in the hope that facts such as these will appeal to your conscience and you will change your mind about accepting this degree from an institution that is materially and ideologically complicit in occupation, siege, and massacre. Your acceptance will be treated as a propaganda victory by those shrill voices who seek neither justice nor peace in Israel and Palestine.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Dr John T. Chalcraft

Writing on behalf of BRICUP (The British Committee for the Universities of Palestine)