

A message to BRICUP's pre UCU Congress 2009 meeting from Rachel Giora,
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Tel Aviv

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Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to express my support of your actions toward helping the boycott movement become engulfing and effective. By responding to the Palestinian call to boycott Israel, you emerged as the pioneers of the boycott movement against Israel and I hope you will be able to witness its impact on redressing injustices and on changing the face of the world.

Thanks to you, the boycott movement against Israel is now gaining force. Examples abound: [Dock workers in South Africa refused to offload a ship carrying Israeli goods](#); [Western Australian members of the Maritime Union of Australia](#) have also called for a boycott of all Israeli vessels and all vessels bearing goods arriving from or going to Israel ; a [Turkish company refused to do business with Israelis](#) "with blood on their hands"; [young individuals in France cleared Israeli goods](#) off a store's shelf. The boycott movement is indeed biting. Israeli goods are losing foreign markets: [21% of Israeli exporters report that they are facing problems in selling Israeli goods](#) because of an anti-Israel boycott, mainly from the UK and Scandinavian countries.

That business is not as usual as can be gleaned from the [EU decision to freeze a planned upgrade of ties with Israel](#) in order to pressure its government to abide by the international commitments made towards the welfare of the Palestinian people. "We expect a stop of all activities undermining our objective of a two-state solution... citing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories ... which is continuing on a daily basis."

Israel is also facing cultural isolation: [Israel's sports teams have met with hostile protests](#) in Sweden, Spain and Turkey. Israeli money donated to help fund the 2009 film festival in Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) was returned to the Israeli Embassy.

The Academic boycott started in Britain by you and people like you is perhaps the most solid form of cultural boycott to-date, resonating in universities and academic institutions all over the world: [Cardiff University divested](#) from Israel; [CUPE-Ontario's University Workers Coordinating Committee](#) (OUWCC) encouraged members "to hold public forums to discuss an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions"; [Quebec College Federation](#) joined the BDS campaign; [Australian scholars called for a boycott](#) of Israeli academic and cultural institutions; [US academics agitated for academic boycott](#) of Israel..

But shouldn't Israeli academic institutions be exempted, some wonder? After all such institutions focus on academic research with no recourse to the military or state politics. But in fact Israeli academia is no different from any

other Israeli institution and in many cases it plays an active if not a vital role in supporting Israeli apartheid practices against the Palestinians. For example, "the R&D [Research & Development] Directorate of the Israel [Ministry of Defense is currently funding 55 projects at TAU](#) [Tel Aviv University]"; "Military R&D in Israel would not exist without the universities. They carry out all the basic scientific investigation, which is then developed either by defense industries or the army"; "People are just not aware of how important university research is in general and how much TAU contributes to Israel's security in particular"; "In the rough and tumble reality of the Middle East, Tel Aviv University is at the front line of the critical work to maintain Israel's military and technological edge."

Israeli universities run special programs for the military. Just recently, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem won the [Defense Ministry Bidding to establish the Military Medical Program](#). Tel Aviv University runs an [Executive Master's Program in Diplomacy and Security](#) at the social sciences faculty, to cite just a few examples.

And in spite of the growing plight of their Palestinian colleagues, universities' senates and heads have never spoken up against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory or against the oppression of the Palestinians; nor have they protested the destructive damage inflicted on Palestinian academic institutions by the Israeli military; nor have they shown any concern for or solidarity with their Palestinian colleagues. And when given the chance to protest "the policy of the Israeli government which is causing restrictions of freedom of movement, study and instruction, and [...] call upon the government to allow students and lecturers free access to all the campuses in the Territories, and to allow lecturers and students who hold foreign passports to teach and study without being threatened with withdrawal of residence visas", only very few (407 out of over 5000) faculty have chosen to sign [this petition](#). Is "academic freedom" only the prerogative of the powerful?

These are only shreds of evidence testifying to the complicity of Israeli academic institutions in the state's apartheid policies against the Palestinians.

In light of Israel's widely documented disregard for international laws exercised in our area for so many years, culminating in two recent wars against civilians in Lebanon and Gaza, it is left for us citizens of the world to attempt to hold up a mirror to Israel's real face in the hope that it will give it a chance to choose justice and peace over occupation.

The growing numbers of Israelis who are now supporting cultural and academic boycotts will rejoice in your achievements.

I wish you luck with your conference and actions.

In solidarity,
Rachel Giora