

BRICUP Newsletter 54

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BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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CONTENTS

P 1 New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership (NYACT)

P 2 The PACBI Column

Palestinian civil society salutes Alice Walker

P 3 Letter to the Editor: Regarding 'hasbara' posts in UK universities

P 4 UNESCO overrides Israel to list the Church of Nativity as a heritage site

P4 We need your vigilance

P 5 Financial support for BRICUP

New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership (NYACT)

The formation of a new academic boycott campaign in New York

On December 19th 2011 New York City Mayor Bloomberg announced that Cornell University and its partner, The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, had won a bid for a massive new

applied sciences and technology campus to be built on Roosevelt Island, in Manhattan. This was agreed behind closed doors, without consulting staff and faculty at Cornell [1].

What the public was not told is that **The Technion is complicit in Israel's violations of international law and the rights of Palestinians**, specifically by designing military weapons and developing technologies that are used to drive Palestinians off their land, repress demonstrations for their rights, and carry out attacks against people in Lebanon, Gaza, and elsewhere [2,3]. For these reasons, The Technion is directly implicated in war crimes. Furthermore, The Technion practices institutional discrimination against Palestinian students by severely restricting their freedom of speech and assembly, and rewarding Jewish students who, unlike Palestinians, perform compulsory military service in Israel [4]. This is in direct contrast to Cornell University's founding values of universalism and inclusion embodied in the university's motto "any person any study". Any collaboration with The Technion makes a university likewise complicit.

In response to the Palestinian call for an academic boycott of Israel in 2004 [5], and the subsequent Appeal for Action against the Cornell University Collaboration with The Technion in March 2012 [6], **New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership (NYACT)** was recently formed.

NYACT is an ad-hoc coalition of New York-based students, academics, activists, writers, laborers, and concerned individuals who are of many different faiths including Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and atheism. Founding members include activists from the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel ([USACBI](http://www.usacbi.org)) and Cornell University [Students for Justice in Palestine](http://www.cornell.edu/studentsforjustice); groups which NYACT continue to work closely with. A wider

framework of support is provided from other NY-based groups, as well as groups across the US, Canada, Palestine, Israel, South Africa, and Europe. Notably, along with Palestinian solidarity groups and grassroots activists, various major Jewish groups support this campaign.

NYACT demand:

1. That the City of New York Administration ends this collaboration, for which \$100 million of New Yorker's tax-payer money has been promised,
2. That the Cornell University Administration ends its partnership with The Technion, in line with the call by the Palestinian Council for Higher Education's request for "non-cooperation in the scientific and technical fields between Palestinian and Israeli universities" [6].

NYACT also ask all people of conscience to join in their support of the international boycott of Israeli academic institutions and universities, and more generally to support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, as called for by Palestinian civil society [7].

Anna Calcutt, NYACT

Next month's issue of the BRICUP Newsletter will include a more detailed article about this campaign.

Notes:

[1]

<http://www.cornellsun.com/section/news/content/2012/03/02/professors-question-cornell-technion-partnership>

[2] <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/new-york-host-israels-top-drone-lab>

[3] www.ipetitions.com/petition/in-opposition-to-cornell-university/

[4] p12-13; Uri Yacobi Keller, *The Economy of the Occupation: A Socioeconomic Bulletin*. (Jerusalem: Alternative Information Center, 2009),

http://usacbi.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/economy_of_the_occupation_23-24.pdf

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

[6] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1829>

[7] Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees; Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions; Palestinian NGO Network, West Bank; Teachers' Federation; Palestinian Writers' Federation; Palestinian League of Artists; Palestinian Journalists' Federation; General Union of Palestinian Women; Palestinian

Lawyers' Association; and tens of other Palestinian federations, associations, and civil society organizations.

The PACBI Column

Palestinian civil society salutes Alice Walker

"It isn't possible for me to permit [publication] at this time for the following reason: As you may know, last Fall in South Africa the Russell Tribunal on Palestine met and determined that Israel is guilty of apartheid and persecution of the Palestinian people, both inside Israel and also in the Occupied Territories. The testimony we heard, both from Israelis and Palestinians (I was a jurist) was devastating. I grew up under American apartheid and this was far worse. Indeed, many South Africans who attended, including Desmond Tutu, felt the Israeli version of these crimes is worse even than what they suffered under the white supremacist regimes that dominated South Africa for so long." – Alice Walker

With these words, world renowned, best-selling author Alice Walker set a new moral standard for international authors and cultural figures. By refusing to allow her famous work, *The Color Purple*, to be published in Israel due to its apartheid system, Walker told Israel and the world that she takes seriously her moral obligation not to be complicit in Israel's occupation, colonization and apartheid. By reiterating her support for BDS in a concrete manner, she sent Palestinians a lucid message of love and true solidarity. Walker knows more than many that love towards the oppressed without supporting their struggle to end oppression amounts to futile charity when what they need is solidarity.

Alice Walker's moral courage and inspiring solidarity was greeted by Palestinians with deep appreciation. The most prominent Palestinian message of gratitude came from the General Union of Palestinian Writers, which issued a warm salute to Walker in a statement that said [1]:

The General Union of Palestinian Writers, while saluting this free intellectual and expressing its profound appreciation for her struggles against regimes of oppression and apartheid, from the darkest chapters of US modern history to South Africa of yesterday and Palestine today, confirms that human dignity is one and the same in all corners of the earth; it resists fragmentation, and it is the negation of color hierarchy.

The courageous message sent by the activist novelist Walker to one of the arms of Zionist propaganda ... removes any uncertainty regarding the kinship between Palestinian, South African, and African American grievances. The similarity between the systems of apartheid in these afflicted geographies is no longer an intellectual seduction or an academic exercise. Unifying local and global struggles against these regimes, with their Euro-American center, is no longer the obsession of dreamers ... The global BDS movement against Israel ... has become a reality and a space for resistance that has cost the colonial and apartheid regime in Israel its toughest losses. The positions of conscientious intellectuals worldwide, their effective contributions to this movement, and their noble defense of its achievement, form the virtue that separates the wheat of intellectuals from their chaff.

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), which was honoured to have received and posted Alice Walker's letter, and indeed Palestinians everywhere, view international support for BDS from prominent international cultural figures of the weight of Alice Walker, Naomi Klein, John Berger, Judith Butler, Etienne Balibar, Ken Loach, Roger Waters, Arundhati Roy, Angela Davis, among many others, as a strong indicator of world revulsion at Israel's intensifying colonization and apartheid as well as its ongoing deadly siege of the Gaza Strip.

Israel's loss of the hearts and minds battle around the world, despite investing many millions of dollars in its largely abortive "Brand Israel" campaign is now recognized by leading voices within the Israeli establishment. In an article interestingly titled, *Losing the Fight*, A *Jerusalem Post* editor criticized

Israeli propaganda's resort to "doctoring" images and presenting unreliable information, arguing that "traditional hasbara no longer works" in an era of digital social media.[2] Alon Liel, a former director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and a former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, has recently expressed support for Alice Walker's cultural boycott of Israel as well as for South Africa's measure towards boycotting Israeli colonies' products.[2]

Alice Walker once wrote, "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." Israel has for many years dwelled on an image of invincibility and unparalleled ruthlessness in dealing with its critics, particularly in the west. With its well-oiled, orchestrated campaigns of bullying and intimidation against critical voices in western colleges, arts communities, faith-based groups, trade unions and civil society at large, Israel and its lobby groups have succeeded in the past to instill fear of even debating Israel's policies, and making these groups feel as if they don't have any power. Today, thanks not only to the widely spreading BDS movement but also to Israel's far-right fanaticism, war mongering and grave, persistent violations of international law, Israel's shield of impunity is being shattered at a stunning rate, and people are reclaiming their power. It is gestures like Walker's cultural boycott of Israel that are acting as valuable catalysts for countering Israel's exceptionalism and questioning blind loyalty to it among western elites.

We salute Alice Walker!

Notes.

[1] <http://pacbi.org/atemplate.php?id=369> (Arabic)

[2]

<http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Features/Article.aspx?id=274707>

[3] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/former-senior-foreign-ministry-official-calls-for-boycott-on-israel/>

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Regarding 'hasbara' posts in UK universities

Many thanks for covering the issue of the phenomenon of 'hasbara' posts in UK universities, which is of growing concern to myself and other colleagues within the Middle East studies academic community.

I wanted to add an additional reflection on these posts for the information of BRICUP supporters. Some of these posts go beyond 'hasbara' to include a 'normalisation' function. For example, part of the duties of the post-holder at Sussex University is to develop links between Middle Eastern scholars and British scholars. In practice, this could mean efforts to bring together Israeli and other Middle Eastern academics in a network or conference with British academics. Whilst BRICUP does not boycott Israeli individuals who are academics or individual academics at Israeli academic institutions, there is a strong tradition amongst Arab academics, artists and other professionals of refusing normalization with Israel until there is justice for the Palestinians. Consequently, efforts by British academics to bring Arab scholars to events in which there is Israeli participation are (either inadvertently or purposefully) part of a broader political agenda of Israel and its supporters that far surpasses the claimed academic objectives of these posts.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Nicola Pratt

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UNESCO overrides Israel to list the Church of Nativity as a heritage site

The UN cultural body UNESCO overrode Israeli objections on Friday to urgently grant world heritage status to a church in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem worshipped as the birthplace of Jesus.

UNESCO's 13-6 secret vote to add the Church of the Nativity and its pilgrimage route to the prestigious list was received with a round of rousing applause and a celebratory fist pump by the beaming head of the Palestinian delegation at the meeting in Russia's second city of Saint Petersburg. "These sites are threatened with total destruction through the Israeli occupation, through the building of the separation wall, because of all the Israeli sanctions and the measures that have been taken to stifle the

Palestinian identity," the Palestinian delegate said after the vote.

The Israeli delegate said the Jewish state supported awarding world heritage status to the ancient church under a completely different procedure that carried no implications for the Middle East peace process. "The decision taken now was totally political and does great damage in our opinion to the (UN) convention and its image," the delegate said. The bid, the first since the Palestinians won controversial membership of UNESCO in October 2011, was submitted "on an emergency basis" because the Palestinians say urgent restoration work is needed.

Their membership has cost the body tens of millions of dollars in lost funding from the United States, Israel's staunchest ally. Israel said the "emergency basis" status essentially meant that the United Nations as a world body was backing the Palestinian view that the church was threatened by the Jewish state's troops. It had proposed co-sponsoring the church's application at a future date -- an idea whose prospects seem remote amid a continuing stalemate in the gruelling Middle East peace process.

Source of report:- FRANCE 24 International News 24/07/2012.

[Full report](#)

We need your vigilance

BRICUP has been very active recently in bringing Israeli 'hasbara' and normalization projects to public attention. For example, see our recent Newsletter articles on the creation of Israeli "hasbara" posts in our Universities (Issues 52, 53 and the Letter in 54) actions against performances in the UK of institutions funded by the Israeli government such as the Israel Philharmonic orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall (Issue 44) and the Habima theatre company's appearance at the Globe theatre (Issue 53). Nevertheless, Israel's 'Brand Israel' campaign in the UK moves relentlessly on. The Tel Aviv based dance company, Batsheva, is planning to tour the UK this autumn and, only last week, we learned of yet another academic conference that is being sponsored by a British University at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem - a university with a campus built on illegally annexed land in East Jerusalem and

which revels in its intimate relationship with the Israeli military machine.

BRICUP will join with other activist groups in attempts to persuade the organizers to cancel these events or, failing that, to raise awareness and mount effective protests against them. But, if we are going to be able to continue to respond effectively to Israel's frantic attempts to use culture and academia to distract attention from its regime of occupation, colonization and apartheid, then we need early warning and accurate information about what is being planned. We therefore ask you to keep vigilant within your own discipline, institution or place of work, and let us or other appropriate activist organizations know as soon as possible if you hear of any event which may fit our criteria for action.

Without your vigilance, Israel's propaganda efforts may go unchallenged.

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are expensive. We need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands.

Please do consider making a donation .

One-off donations may be made by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or

by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at

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Like all organisations, while we welcome one-off donations, we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

You can [download a standing order form](#).here.

More details can be obtained from

treasurer@bricup.org.uk

Letters to the Editor

Please notice that this issue contains a "Letter to the Editor". We urge you to use this facility. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of our campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month's newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible. Letters and comments should be sent to newsletter@bricup.org.uk