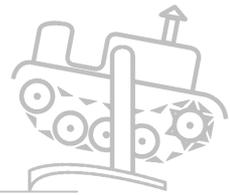


BRICUP
British Committee for
Universities of Palestine



AN OPEN LETTER TO RUSSELL BANKS

*from the British Committee
for the Universities of Palestine
info@bricup.org.uk*

Monday 28 April 2008

Dear Russell Banks:

As people who are aware of your honourable history of activism on the Israel-Palestine issue, we're struggling to understand why you've agreed to take part in the International Writers' Festival in occupied Jerusalem in May this year. It doesn't add up.

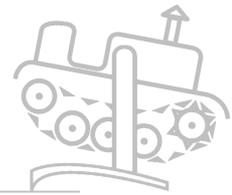
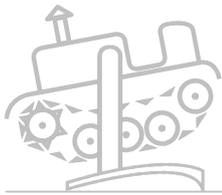
In July 2002 you signed an international appeal for Israel to stop obstructing the work of Birzeit University in the Palestinian West Bank (illegally colonised by Israel). We know you did, because at least two of us were co-signatories of that appeal.

Six years later, are Birzeit and its students any closer to enjoying the right to pursue education free from military incursion, arbitrary arrest, detention without charge or trial, checkpoint, curfew, destruction of equipment? -- all the so-called 'security' measures that Israel brings to bear to deny young Palestinians an education, demolish their hopes, and encourage them to leave. You surely know the answer.

You, we, and the other signatories to the 2002 appeal called for the international community to 'assume its responsibility under humanitarian law by taking real and concrete steps to provide protection to the Palestinian civilian population'. You must know that today the Palestinian civilian population is more exposed than ever.

And yet you've chosen this moment to give the Israeli authorities the propaganda coup of your presence in Jerusalem.

In March 2002 you were in Gaza City with the International Parliament of Writers, of which you were then president. You are reported to have told the Palestinians, 'You are not



alone'. But you are about to take part in an event which is substantially funded by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This action will speak louder than any of the words you have previously spoken.

Maybe you will argue that you are going to take part in a public discussion with Israeli writer Etgar Keret, and Keret is a mild sort of person, not a sharp-fanged advocate of ethnic cleansing. But it's not what you actually do at the festival that matters; it's the fact that someone like you, well known for his principled stand on issues of human rights, is going there at all.

Keret recognises that violence against the Palestinians is in the bedrock of Israeli society. 'I didn't serve in the occupied territories', he told the LA Weekly (and pastes up on his website), 'but people who do know that if you knock on a door and it doesn't open, you kick it open. You can play the guitar, read Nietzsche, become a very good dentist, but you'll still do it. And once you cross that line, it's very difficult to uncross it'.

This International Writers' Festival is a guitar-playing moment. Just because people read Russell Banks novels doesn't mean they aren't also out there in the Occupied Territories, kicking down doors. And you know as well as we do that, systematically and as a matter of policy, Israel commits far worse crimes against the Palestinians than kicking down doors.

Why are you giving them the balm and consolation of your presence in Jerusalem? Please don't go.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Hilary Rose
Professor Steven Rose
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine
BM BRICUP
London
Wc1N 3XX

<http://www.bricup.org.uk>