



BRICUP
British Committee for
Universities of Palestine



PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BRICUP denounces supporters of Israel's attempt to suppress free speech

The British Committee for Universities of Palestine (BRICUP) today denounced the effort by unnamed members of the University and College Union (UCU) to prevent free debate of Israel's actions in the union. The legal challenge to the UCU, said BRICUP, demonstrates the desperation and the hypocrisy of those of those who wish to defend Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine. The attack on UCU is aimed at defending the Israeli universities and colleges that are complicit in that occupation. This challenge to motion 25, which was passed overwhelmingly at UCU Congress in 2007, shows that it is not academic freedom that is the concern of four UCU members who conceal their identity but desperation to prevent any and all criticism being levelled at Israeli policy.

It is not the first time that law firm Mishcon de Reya has sent threatening letters to a trade union to attempt to deflect them from democratically debated and agreed actions.

Following conference decisions by the Association of University Teachers in 2005, the union received no fewer than four legal challenges.

British Committee for Universities of Palestine BM BRICUP
London WC1N 3XX GB

www.bricup.org.uk

info@bricup.org.uk

Motion 25 falls far short of the motion that, in BRICUP opinion, would be appropriate to the circumstances. It does not call for a boycott by UCU members of those Israeli universities and colleges which fail to dissociate themselves from the occupation. That is the policy that BRICUP believes might succeed in causing the Israeli academic community to question its Government's actions.

“Motion 25 only asked members to reflect on the moral and political implications of continuing links with Israeli educational institutions and to discuss the occupation with any of their individual academic and scholarly collaborators in Israel.” said Prof. Jonathan Rosenhead of BRICUP. “We maintain that critical reflection is the duty of all academics. We are amazed that anyone should seek to make free thought illegitimate.

The motion also called for an investigation of the operation of one particular college (Ariel) which is illegally situated on occupied land, and is designed to further entrench the illegal occupation of the territory. Professor Jonathan Rosenhead said, “It is a looking glass world where those seeking to end an illegal act should find themselves in the dock”

Professor Haim Bresheeth, an Israeli born academic working at the University of East London commented, “Opposition to this motion can be interpreted as little else than a determination to support an illegal occupation, and to prevent any debate or discussion of Israeli policy in the occupied territories, or of Israel’s human rights record in those territories.”

There is a further, and equally shocking, aspect of this legal challenge. Dr Sue Blackwell a member of the UCU national executive said, “I am horrified that members of my trade union should seek to use the courts to overturn a democratically decided policy of our own union rather than to argue their case through the democratic forums of the union and win or lose it on its merits. I welcome such a debate. Sadly this is not the first time that UCU and its predecessor unions have experienced such legal threats. I look forward to the real issues being debated so that the public can see what bullies these people are”

BRICUP believes that all members of the UCU must have the freedom of a trade union to debate issues of concern. This applies to every member: those who support motion 25 and those who wish to overturn it; those who defend Israel and those who condemn it.

For more information contact

Mike Cushman

mike@mikecushman.co.uk

More information

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine

BRICUP is an organisation of UK based academics, set up in response to the Palestinian Call for Academic Boycott. Its twin missions are:

- to support Palestinian universities, staff and students, and
- to oppose the continued illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands with its concomitant breaches of international conventions of human rights, its refusal to accept UN resolutions or rulings of the International Court, and its persistent suppression of Palestinian academic freedom.

In support of this call for a boycott, BRICUP will:

- Continue to put pressure on the EU and the UK government for the exclusion of Israel from the European Research Area.
- Develop a policy which encourages individual academics to break their professional links with Israel by such actions as:
 - 1 - Refusing research collaborations with Israeli institutions or to referee papers or grant applications issuing from such institutions
 - 2 - Refusing to attend academic conferences in Israel
 - 3 - Supporting Israeli academic colleagues working with Palestinian colleagues in their demand for self-determination and academic freedom
- Work within our trades unions and professional organisations in support of such actions
- Explore forms of support to Palestinian academic colleagues

See www.bricup.org.uk

Text of UCU motion 25 as passed at Congress 2007

Motion 25:

Congress notes the

1. continuation of illegal settlement, killing of civilians and the impossibility of civil life, including education;
2. humanitarian catastrophe imposed on Gaza by Israel and the EU;
3. apparent complicity of most of the Israeli academy;
4. legal attempts to prevent UCU debating boycott of Israeli academic institutions; and legal advice that such debates are lawful

Congress affirms that

5. criticism of Israel or Israeli policy are not, as such, anti-semitic;
6. pursuit and dissemination of knowledge are not uniquely immune from their moral and political consequences;

Congress resolves that

7. colleagues be asked to consider the moral and political implications of educational links with Israeli institutions, and to discuss the occupation with individuals and institutions concerned, including Israeli colleagues with whom they are collaborating;
8. UCU widely disseminate the personal testimonies of UCU and PFUPE delegations to Palestine and the UK, respectively;
9. the testimonies will be used to promote a wide discussion by colleagues of the appropriateness of continued educational links with Israeli academic institutions;

10. UCU facilitate and encourage twinning arrangements and other direct solidarity with Palestinian institutions;

11. Ariel College, an explicitly colonising institution in the West Bank, be investigated under the formal Greylisting* Procedure

* Greylisting is UCU's procedure for action against institutions, in the UK or abroad, which break normal rules of behaviour and if an institution is greylisted that members are expected not to apply for jobs there, act as external examiners or co-operate with it in any way.

Details of previous legal threats to AUT (a predecessor union of UCU)

<http://www.sue.be/pal/academic/Haifa-legal.pdf>

<http://www.ee.bgu.ac.il/~censor/katz-directory/05-05-19julius-AUT-legal.pdf>