

CAMPAIGN TO BOYCOTT THE ORAL HISTORY CONFERENCE AT HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

hebrewUboycott@gmail.com

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Dear Colleagues:

We are a group of Palestinian, Israeli, and other oral historians and academics from Europe, South Africa, and North America calling on you to boycott the June 2014 'International Conference on Oral History' organised by the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. While all Israeli universities are deeply complicit in the occupation, settler-colonialism, and apartheid, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is particularly noteworthy, as we explain below.

Your actions have a direct impact on our joint struggle for a just peace in Palestine-Israel and on our solidarity with fellow Palestinian academics whose universities have been closed down, blockaded and even bombed by Israeli aircraft in the last three decades; universities which have been subjected to a lengthy and brutal Israeli occupation in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Specifically, the land on which some of its Mount Scopus campus buildings and facilities were expanded was acquired as a result of Israel's 1968 illegal confiscation of 3345 dunums of Palestinian land. [1] This confiscated land in East Jerusalem is occupied territory according to international law. Israel's unilateral annexation of occupied East Jerusalem into the State of Israel, and the application of Israeli domestic law to it, are violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and have been repeatedly denounced as null and void by the international community, including by the UN Security Council (Resolution 252, 21 May 1968). Moving Israeli staff and students to work and live on occupied Palestinian land places the Hebrew University in grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Conventions.

Further, the university is complicit in the unequal treatment of Palestinians, including those who are citizens of Israel. [2] For instance, it does not provide teaching services to the residents of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas in contrast to those provided to Jewish groups; no courses are offered in Arabic. [3] Additionally, the Hebrew University has chosen to remain silent when the entire population of Gaza has been excluded from the possibility to enrol and study in the university by the Israeli government. Palestinian students from Gaza have a better chance of getting into a university in the U.S than into Hebrew University.

The Hebrew University administration restricts the freedom of speech and protest of its few Palestinian students. For example, it had forbidden a commemoration event for the invasion of the Gaza Strip in 2008-2009 in which about 1,400 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli forces. [4] On the other hand, the Hebrew University offered special considerations and benefits to students who participated in that invasion as soldiers.

In December 2012 Israel's Minister of Defence approved recognition of Ariel University in the illegal colony of Ariel as an Israeli university in the Israeli academic system. As a result, staff from the Hebrew University take part in the supervision and promotion committees of students and staff from the colonial university of Ariel; and the (Jewish only) staff takes part in the supervision and in promotion committees for Hebrew University students and staff. The Hebrew University recognizes academic degrees awarded by the Ariel University, which is built on confiscated Palestinian land and surrounded by Palestinian communities, but does not recognize degrees awarded by the nearby Al-Quds University. [5]

Ironically, the oral history conference is organised by an institute named after Avraham Harman, President of the Hebrew University from 1968 to 1983. As President of the Hebrew University he was directly responsible for the rebuilding and expansion of the original campus on Mount Scopus built on land illegally confiscated from Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

At a time when the international movement to boycott Israeli academic and cultural institutions is gaining ground in response to Israel's flagrant and persistent infringement of Palestinian human and political rights, we urge scholars and professionals to reflect upon the implications of taking part in a conference at a complicit institution, and to refrain from such participation. The conference is an attempt to improve the image and reputation of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the West and to cover up for the fact that the university is closely associated with Israeli annexation and 'Separation/Apartheid Wall' policies—policies that were strongly condemned on 9 July 2004 by the International Court of Justice in The Hague.[6]

Since the hegemonic world powers are actively complicit in enabling and perpetuating Israel's colonial and oppressive policies, we believe that the only avenue open to achieving justice and upholding international law is sustained work on the part of Palestinian and international civil society to put pressure on Israel and its complicit institutions to end this oppression.

Inspired by the successful cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa, and supported by key Palestinian unions and cultural groups, in 2004, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) issued a call for the academic and cultural boycott of institutions involved in Israel's system of occupation, colonialism and apartheid. The Palestinian call appealed to the international academic community, among other things, to "refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with *Israeli institutions*" [7].

Following this, in 2005, an overwhelming majority in Palestinian civil society called for an all-encompassing BDS campaign based on the principles of human rights, justice, freedom and equality [8]. The BDS movement adopts a nonviolent, morally consistent strategy to hold Israel accountable to the same human rights and international law standards as other nations. It is asking the international academic community to heed the boycott call, as it did in the struggle against South African apartheid, until "Israel withdraws from all the lands occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; removes all its colonies in those lands; agrees to United Nations resolutions relevant to the restitution of Palestinian refugees rights; and dismantles its system of apartheid" [9].

Paralleling the Apartheid era boycott of complicit South African universities, we believe that participation in academic conferences or similar events in Israel - regardless of intentions- can only contribute to the prolongation of this injustice by normalizing and thereby legitimizing it. It inadvertently contributes to Israel's efforts to appear as a normal participant in the world of scholarship while at the same time it practices the most pernicious form of colonial control and legalized racial discrimination against Palestinians.

Until Israel fully complies with international laws and conventions, we sincerely hope that international academics will not participate in endorsing their violations and the basic human rights of Palestinians – even if inadvertently. We call on our colleagues to treat Israel exactly the same way that most of the world treated racist South Africa - or indeed any other state that legislates and practices apartheid: as a pariah state. Only then can Palestinians hope for a just peace based on international law, respect for human rights, and, more crucially, on the fundamental principle of equality for all, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or other identity considerations.

We, therefore, urge you to boycott the Hebrew University of Jerusalem oral history conference and to call on your colleagues to refuse to participate in it; to refuse to cross the Palestinian picket line.

[Note: All footnotes are at the end of the document following a note on academic freedom.]

Sincerely,

1. Professor Ahmed Abbes, Directeur de Recherche au CNRS, Bures-sur-Yvette, France
2. Professor Saleh Abdel Jawad (Hamayel), Birzeit University, Palestine
3. Professor Nadia Abu el Haj, Barnard/Columbia University, USA
4. Professor Lila Abu-Lughod, Columbia University, New York, USA
5. Professor Ghada Ageel, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
6. Professor Ammiel Alcalay, Queens College, City of New York, USA
7. Dr. Diana Allan, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA
8. Professor Lori Allen, University of Cambridge, England
9. Professor Amjad Barham, Hebron University, President of the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees, Palestine
10. Ryvka Barnard, Doctoral student, New York University, USA
11. Dr. Samia al-Botmeh, Birzeit University, Palestine
12. Professor Oren Ben-Dor, Southampton University, England
13. Professor Hagit Borer, Queen Mary, University of London, England
14. Dr Robert Boyce, London School of Economics and Political Science, London University, UK
15. Professor Haim Bresheeth, SOAS, University of London, England
16. Professor Michael Chanan, University of Roehampton, England
17. Professor Hamid Dabashi, Columbia University, New York, USA
18. Professor Lawrence Davidson, West Chester University, USA
19. Professor (emerita) Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, Université Paris, France
20. Professor Ann Douglas, Columbia University, New York, USA
21. Professor Haidar Eid, Al-Aqsa University, Gaza, Palestine
22. Professor Randa Farah, University of Western Ontario, Canada
23. Professor (emeritus), Emmanuel Farjoun, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
24. Arie Finkelstein, Student, Université Paris Est, France
25. Senior Scholar Bill Fletcher, Jr., Institute for Policy Studies; former President, TransAfrica Forum, Washington, DC, USA
26. Professor Cynthia Franklin, University of Hawai'i
27. Professor Candace Fujikane, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu
28. Dr Terri Ginsberg, ICMES, New York, USA
29. Professor (emerita) Sherna Berger Gluck, California State University, Long Beach, USA
30. Professor (emeritus) Yerach Gover, City University of New York, USA
31. Professor Michel Gros, CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research, Rennes, France
32. Professor (emerita) Sondra Hale, University of California, Los Angeles, USA
33. Professor Salah D. Hassan, Michigan State University, Lansing, USB
34. Professor Sami Hermez, University of Pittsburgh, USA
35. Shir Hever, Independent Economist/Researcher, Palestine-Israel
36. Tineke E. Jansen, Independent researcher, former IOHA Council member, England
37. Professor Rhoda Kanaaneh, Columbia University, New York, USA
38. Dr. Fatma Kassem, Independent researcher, Israel
39. Professor Robin D. Kelley, University of California, Los Angeles, USA
40. Professor Tarif Khalidi, Center for Arab & Middle Eastern Studies, American University, Beirut Lebanon

41. Dr Laleh Khalili, Reader in Politics, SOAS, University of London, England
42. Professor David Klein, California State University, Northridge, USA
43. Professor Dennis Kortheuer, California State University, Long Beach
44. Professor Ronit Lentin, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland
45. Dr Les Levidow, Open University, UK
46. Professor David Colles Lloyd, University of California, Riverside
47. Professor (emeritus) Moshé Machover, Kings College, University of London, England
48. Professor Nur Masalha, SOAS, University of London, England
49. Professor Joseph Massad, Columbia University, New York, USA
50. Professor William Messing, University of Minnesota, USA
51. Jennifer Mogannam, Ph. D. candidate, University of California, San Diego
52. Professor Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Syracuse University, New York, USA
53. Professor Ahlam Muhtaseb, California State University, San Bernardino, USA
54. Dr Karma Nabulsi, University of Oxford, UK
55. Professor Premilla Nadasen, Queens College, City of New York, USA
56. Dr. Dorothy Naor, Independent researcher, Israel
57. Dr Sonia Nimr, Birzeit University, Palestine
58. Professor Isis Nusair, Denison University, Ohio, USA
59. Professor Gary Y. Okihiro, Columbia University, New York, USA
60. Professor Ilan Pappé, Exeter University, England
61. Professor Willie Van Peer, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany
62. Professor Gabriel Piterberg, UCLA, USA
63. Professor Jonathan Rosenhead, London School of Economics, University of London, UK
64. Dr Rosemary Sayigh, Center for Arab and Middle East Studies Centre, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon
65. Professor (emeritus) Pierre Schapira, University Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, France
66. Professor (Emerita) Evalyn F. Segal, PhD, San Diego State University, USA
67. Professor May Seikaly, Wayne State University, Detroit, USA
68. Professor Sherene Seikaly, American University in Cairo, Egypt
69. Professor Anton Shammass, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA
70. Professor Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, New York (USA)
71. Professor Andor Skotnes, Chair, Department of History and Society, The Sage Colleges, Troy, NY, USA
72. Dr Kobi Snitz, Weizmann Institute, Israel
73. Professor Ghada Talhami, Lake Forest College, Illinois, USA
74. Professor Lisa Taraki, Birzeit University, Palestine
75. Sibel Taylor, PhD candidate, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, England
76. Dr Salim Vally, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
77. Dr. Patrick Wolfe, Trobe University, Australia
78. Dr Hala Yameni, Bethlehem University, Bethlehem, Palestine
79. Professor Mahmoud Zeidan, University of Cairo, Egypt

Endorsed by the following Academic and Cultural Boycott Campaigns: AURPID (France); BOYCOTT! (Israel); BRICUP (UK); InCACBI (India); PACBI (Palestine); USACBI (USA); and by the Alternative Information Centre (Israel); and the University of Toronto SJP (Canada).

To add your name to this list of signatories please email: hebrewconferenceboycott@gmail.com

THE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights defines academic freedom to include:

the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the state or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction. The enjoyment of academic freedom carries with it *obligations*, such as the duty to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views, and to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds. [10], emphasis added]

Keeping this definition in mind, we are keenly aware of the importance of the academic freedom of the individual, but also believe that such freedoms should not extend automatically to institutions. Judith Butler reminds us that: “our struggles for academic freedom must work in concert with the opposition to state violence, ideological surveillance, and the systematic devastation of everyday life.” [11]

It is incumbent on academics to develop such a nuanced understanding of academic freedom if we are to call for social justice and work alongside the oppressed in advancing their freedom, equality and self-determination.

The Israeli academy is not the bastion of dissent and liberalism it is purported to be by those who defend Israel and attempt to delegitimize the call for academic boycott. The vast majority of the Israeli academic community is oblivious to the oppression of the Palestinian people--both inside Israel and in the occupied territory--and has never opposed the practices and policies of their state. In fact, they duly serve in the reserve forces of the occupation army and, accordingly are likely to be either perpetrators of or silent witnesses to the daily brutality of the occupation. They also do not hesitate to partner in their academic research with the security-military establishment that is the chief architect and executor of the occupation. A petition drafted by four Israeli academics merely calling on the Israeli government “to allow [Palestinian] students and lecturers free access to all the campuses in the [occupied] Territories, and to allow lecturers and students who hold foreign passports to teach and study without being threatened with withdrawal of residence visas,” was endorsed by only 407 out of 9,000 Israeli academics – less than 5% of those who were invited to sign it. [12]

Notes:

[1] The decision was published in the official Israeli Gazette (the Hebrew edition), number 1425. It was therefore “legalized” by Israel. This land, for the most part, was (still is) privately owned by Palestinians living in that area. A large part of the confiscated land was then given to the Hebrew University to expand its campus (mainly its dormitories). The Palestinian landowners refused to leave their lands and homes arguing that the confiscation order of 1968 was illegal. When the case was taken to the Jerusalem District Court in 1972 (file no. 1531/72), the court ruled in favor of the University and the state, deciding that the Palestinian families must evacuate their homes and be offered alternative housing. See also <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/02/12/un-report-accuses-israel-of-pushing-palestinians-from-jerusalem-west-bank/>

[2] Keller, U. (2009) the Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories. *The Economy of the Occupation: A Socioeconomic Bulletin*: Alternative Information Centre. http://www.alternativenews.org/images/stories/downloads/Economy_of_the_occupation_23-24.pdf

[3] <http://www.jpost.com/Local-Israel/In-Jerusalem/Hebrew-University-in-Arabic>

[4] <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3827102,00.html>

- [5] http://www.jewishlinkbc.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=944:lapid-threatens-to-bring-down-the-govt-on-haredi-army-issue&catid=150:news&Itemid=562
- [6] <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6&ca>
- [7] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>
- [8] <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52>
- [9] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2102>
- [10] UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "The Right to Education (Art.13)," December 8, 1999 [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument)
- [11] Judith Butler. "Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom." in: *Radical Philosophy*, Vol. 135. pp. 8-17, January/February 2006. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/articles/israel-palestine-paradoxes-of-academic-freedom/> (Accessed on December 10, 2011)
- [12] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=792>