

29 April 2010

*On behalf of*

*Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine*

*Campagna Diritto allo Studio e Libertà Accademica in Palestina*

*Comissió Universitària Catalana per Palestina*

*British Committee for the Universities of Palestine*

Dear Sir David

The award of the 2010 Wolf Foundation prize for the arts places you in most distinguished company, which we are sure is as gratifying as it is deserved. There are however implications of accepting such an honour from a prominent Israeli foundation, indeed from the hands of the President of the State of Israel in the Israeli Knesset: in effect an Israeli award.

Israel's troubled and problematic present situation puts it in an almost unique category, as an occupying power over territory and people in violation of many United Nations resolutions and the settled opinion of the international community. For some more detail on this background we have provided a note, which is attached.

In 2005 virtually the entirety of Palestinian civil society issued a call for boycott, divestment and sanctions to be applied to Israel (see <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=66>). The previous year representative Palestinian organisations made a similar call specifically for the boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions. We hope that you will give thought to ways in which you can respond to this appeal for non-violent pressure to be put on Israel to end the occupation and the human rights abuses which inevitably accompany it.

We realise that for you to respond to this appeal may put you in an embarrassing situation – for example with those to whom you have made commitments. But consider whether you would have accepted the award of a similar prize from a South African foundation in

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the days of Apartheid. Yet that is a regime recognisably similar to present-day Israel (as many South Africans including Archbishop Desmond Tutu have acknowledged – see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1957644.stm>).

We hope that you will wish to decline this award and make public your reasons for doing so.

If however you should decide to accept the prize, please bear in mind the opportunity available to you to distance yourself from the political context of the award ceremony.

Yehudi Menuhin, who received the Wolf Foundation prize for the Arts in 1991, used his acceptance speech in the Knesset to denounce Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories:

"This wasteful governing by fear, by contempt for the basic dignities of life, this steady asphyxiation of a dependent people, should be the very last means to be adopted by those who themselves know too well the awful significance, the unforgettable suffering of such an existence. It is unworthy of my great people, the Jews, who have striven to abide by a code of moral rectitude for some 5,000 years, who can create and achieve a society for themselves such as we see around us but can yet deny the sharing of its great qualities and benefits to those dwelling amongst them." (*Jerusalem Post*, 6 May 1991)

Daniel Barenboim, who received the Wolf Foundation Prize for the Arts in 2004, issued a similar protest in his acceptance speech:

"Can a situation of occupation and control of another people be reconciled with (Israel's) Declaration of Independence?" he asked. "Is there logic to the independence of one people at the cost of a blow to the basic human rights of another people?"

"Can the Jewish people whose history is a record of continued suffering and relentless persecution, allow themselves to be indifferent to the rights and suffering of a neighboring people?" (<http://www.Israelforum.com>, 5 December 2004)

Barenboim devoted the prize money to support music education for Israeli and Palestinian youth.

David Mumford, co-winner of the Wolf Foundation prize for Mathematics in 2009, announced at the ceremony that he would donate the prize money to Bir Zeit University in the Occupied West Bank, and to Gisha, an Israeli organization dedicated to promoting the freedom of movement of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

"I decided to donate my share of the Wolf Prize to enable the academic community in occupied Palestine to survive and thrive. I am very grateful for the prize, but I believe that Palestinian students should have an opportunity to go elsewhere to acquire an education. Students in the West Bank and Gaza today do not have an opportunity to do that." (<http://www.Haaretz.com>, 23 June 2009)

The Israeli government hopes to burnish Israel's image as a bastion of culture and scientific progress by associating itself with you through the Wolf Foundation prize. The award, however, offers you the opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to justice and human rights including the rights of Palestinians denied to them by Israel. The signatories of this letter along with many other academics, scholars and artists earnestly count on you to do so.

With our best regards

(for) *British Committee for the Universities of Palestine*

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## **Some background notes on Israel, Palestine and the Occupation**

The broad pattern of Israeli territorial expansion and ethnic discrimination is probably familiar to you, but it may be useful if we briefly summarise some aspects of it. In 1948 the creation of a 'Jewish state' in Palestine was achieved at the cost of driving at least three quarters of a million Arabs into exile. (See for example Illan Pappé *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, One World, Oxford, 2006.) Through war Israel expanded its territory from the 54 per cent of the land west of the Jordan River allocated to them in the UN-sanctioned partition plan of 1947, to 78 per cent by 1949. In order to avoid accusations of discrimination, the new state transferred the land appropriated from fleeing Arabs, as well as land appropriated from those Arabs who remained inside Israel, to the Jewish National Fund and other organisations which restrict the use of these lands to Jews only.

In 1967 Israel expanded its territory again, seizing Gaza from Egypt, east Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria, and drove more Palestinians into exile. As a result, today, 62 years after Israel's establishment, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) registers 4.7 million Palestinians as refugees. The territory remaining under Palestinian control in the Occupied Territories has been reduced to merely 8 per cent of the land west of the Jordan. Within Israel the Arab minority – 1.5 million Palestinians, 20 per cent of the total population – are restricted to living on barely more than 5 per cent of the land, and since they are almost invariably refused building permits, many of them face the constant threat of dispossession.

Israeli discrimination against the Palestinians has taken many forms, but aside from land ownership and dispossession the most disturbing form has been the unequal right of abode and citizenship. Israel's 1950 Law of Return affirms the right of Jews and their spouses everywhere in the world to settle in Israel and obtain citizenship. Israel's 2003 Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law prohibits spouses of Arab citizens of Israel who come from the West Bank, Gaza or any Arab country from entering Israel or receiving residency rights or citizenship – including children of such marriages. Not long after its adoption, this law was applied retrospectively with the expulsion of wives and mothers of Arab Israeli citizens.

As the historian Shlomo Sand, the anthropologist Jeff Halper and other Israelis affirm, Israel is not a democracy but an ethocracy. It accords full citizenship rights only to the Jewish majority while systematically discriminating against its Palestinian minority. Israel's military forces meanwhile make normal life practically impossible for the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories by destroying infrastructure, obstructing movement and denying access to water resources, while facilitating the establishment of

Jewish-only settlements. The ultimate aim, barely disguised, is to absorb the land, though not its Palestinian inhabitants, into a Greater Israel.

Since 1967 Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, settlement building on Palestinian land and dispossession of Arab inhabitants have been the subject of numerous resolutions in the UN Security Council and General Assembly: so many in fact that apologists for Israel claim that the UN 'demonises' the country. Suffice it to note that most of the substantive General Assembly resolutions have been adopted by margins of 150 or 160 to 3, 4 or 5, with only the United States and a few minor states such as Dominica, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru or Tuvalu joining Israel in voting against. (<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/stats/un.html>; Norman G. Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Verso, London, 2003)

In July 2004 the International Court of Justice by a margin of 14 to 1 declared the 'Separation Wall' being built by Israel largely inside the Occupied Territories to be illegal. In its Advisory Opinion, the Court expressed its grave concern at "the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian land and resources, the disruption of the lives of thousands of protected civilians and the *de facto* annexation of large areas of territory, and ...at the even more devastating impact of the projected parts of the wall on the Palestinian civilian population and on the prospects for solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and establishing peace in the region." It also reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. (<http://www.icjci.org/docket/index.php?p1=3&p2=4&k=5a&case=131&code=mwp&p3=4>)

Israel's bombardment and subsequent invasion of Gaza in December 2008, following two years of illegal blockade, prompted further objections from international bodies. The Factfinding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, headed by the South African jurist Richard Goldstone and adopted by the UN General Assembly in November 2009, concluded that established Israeli policy "amounts to collective punishment intentionally inflicted by the Government of Israel on the people of the Gaza Strip. ...From the facts gathered, the Mission found that the following grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention were committed by the Israeli armed forces in Gaza: wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, and extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly."

(<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/FactFindingMission.htm>)

Israeli spokespersons have dismissed the Goldstone Report as one-sided and inaccurate. The Report, however, does little more than corroborate the findings of other respected international observers and agencies. Richard Falk, Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the

Palestinian Territories, wrote: “Even before Israel's December 27 attack, its prolonged blockade of Gaza had brought about a grave humanitarian crisis. The blockade is a form of collective punishment, and as such it is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. On top of that, Israel's military assault inflicted massive loss of civilian life and severe damage to civilian infrastructure, including many public buildings not connected to Hamas's military. Even if Israel's claims of defensive response are accepted at face value, this is excessive use of force. There are also widespread reports that Israel has used legally dubious weapons like white phosphorus, dense inert metal explosives and depleted uranium. And finally, through its rigid control of exits, Israel has denied the people even the right to flee the fighting, a violation of humanitarian law that lends credibility to the claim that Israeli occupation policy essentially imprisons Gazans.”

(<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090209/falk>)

Human Rights Watch similarly reported strong evidence of war crimes by Israel: “To explain the high number of civilian casualties in Gaza, Israeli officials have repeatedly blamed Hamas for using civilians as “human shields” and for fighting from civilian sites. In the cases documented in the report, Human Rights Watch found no evidence of Hamas using human shields in the vicinity at the time of the attacks. ... [F]or multiple reasons it concluded that the IDF had deliberately or recklessly used white phosphorus munitions in violation of the laws of war.” (<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/25/israel-white-phosphorus-use-evidence-war-crimes>)

Amnesty International’s extensive report in July 2009 concluded: “The scale and intensity of the attacks were unprecedented, even in the context of the

increasingly lethal Israeli military campaigns in Gaza in previous years. More Palestinians were killed and more properties were destroyed in the 22-day military campaign than in any previous Israeli offensive. Israeli forces could not conceivably have been unaware of the presence of civilians in locations which were repeatedly attacked, including with white phosphorus and other imprecise weapons, given that these areas were under close surveillance by Israeli drones. ...The pattern of attacks and the resulting high number of civilian fatalities and casualties showed elements of reckless conduct, disregard for civilian lives and property and a consistent failure to distinguish between military targets and civilians and civilian objects.” (*Israel/Gaza. Operation ‘Cast Lead’: 22 Days of Death and Destruction*, <http://www.amnesty.org.uk>)

Israel has refused to cooperate with any of the above-mentioned individuals or organisations in their investigations, or to institute an independent enquiry of its own into questions concerning military operations in Gaza. Its behaviour in ‘Operation Cast Lead’ is, however, consistent with the policy it has pursued towards the Palestinian people since before Israel’s independence in 1948, which has been characterised by a willful disregard for the Palestinians’ right to share the territory west of the Jordan and determination to dispossess them of their land. Regrettably the situation appears to be worsening. On 26 March 2010 *The Times* led with an article on Israeli displacement of Palestinians from

east Jerusalem: “Binyamin Netanyahu: we will continue to build in Jerusalem”. ([http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article7076976.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article7076976.ece)) On 12 April 2010 the newspaper leads with an article on Israeli plans to expel tens of thousands of Palestinians from their homes in the Occupied Territories: ‘Mass deportation feared after West Bank permit ruling’. ([http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article7094854.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article7094854.ece))