

Complicity or Solidarity? You have a choice !

An open letter addressed to the participants of the "Swiss Season" in Israel: Basler Madrigalisten; Alias/Guilherme Botelho, Raphaël Cuomo and Maria Iorio; Isabelle Favez; Catalin Dorian Florescu; Bruno Ganz; Fabrice Gygi and Christoph Büchel; Sophie Heldman; Christina Hemauer and Roman Keller; Christian Kracht; Ueli Mäder; Ioannis Mandafounis and Fabrice Mazliah; Tabea Martin; Ernesto Molinari; Lionel Monnet, Xavier Pignat and Julian Zufferey (Trio Note Bene); Louis Palmer; Peng! Palast Theater Group; Erik Schmit; Mohammed Soudani; Rudolf Steiner and Barbara Meyer Cesta; Michel Wintsch, Baenz Oester and Gerry Hemingway (WHO trio); Zürcher Ballet Heinz Spoerli

Geneva, Basel, Ramallah, Tel Aviv, Sept. 26, 2011

Original: french, english

We understand that the "Culturescapes Israel" festival has been launched in Switzerland for a period of three months, and, simultaneously, the "Swiss Season" in Israel organized by Culturescapes in cooperation with Israeli government institutions, has also begun. It is with great disappointment that we have learned that you plan to participate in the "Swiss Season" events and that you will represent Swiss artistic creation in Israel.

The BDS Campaign Switzerland, that supports the Palestinian call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against the State of Israel, has for over several months denounced these two cultural programs as being part of a media offensive orchestrated by the Israeli government and its related institutions. This year's Culturescapes festival has received financial and logistical support from the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry as well as the "Switzerland-Israel Association", the most important pro-Israeli lobby in Switzerland. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also involved in the organization of the "Swiss Season" in Israel.[1] Israel hopes to turn the public's attention away from its revolting oppressive practices. It is because of this misuse of culture and art in order to legitimize Israel's inhumane policies that the BDS movement has specifically called upon those who work in the cultural field in Switzerland to refuse to collaborate with this scheme and avoid participating in the events organized this year around Israel by the Foundation Culturescapes.

Perhaps you are not aware of the fact that you are being manipulated to get involved in a vast propaganda campaign to rebrand Israel. Please note that you can refuse to be part of this. Rather than lending support to a state whose practices against humanity shake people's conscience, we propose that you listen to the call from the Palestinian people to support their struggle for life and justice by nonviolent means of BDS. More than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations including trade unions and grassroots groups have appealed to people of conscience all over the world, asking them to boycott Israel in order to express their disagreement with Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing and dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian population.[2] Palestinian artists and intellectuals too have been active, calling for a cultural and academic boycott by which they ask their colleagues to refuse to be instrumentalized by an oppressive state.[3] Palestinian civil society is addressing itself directly to citizens all over the world in order to compensate for the moral bankruptcy of governments who, by their support or silence, have allowed crimes against humanity to be committed with complete impunity in Palestine. In this regard, we denounce the fact that the Swiss Confederation and Pro-Helvetia Foundation officially support the "Culturescapes Israel" festival and the "Swiss Season" in Israel.

We are addressing all of you invited to participate in the "Swiss Season", not least the actor Bruno Ganz, the Zurich Ballet Heinz Spoerli, the Basel Madrigalisten, the Peng! Palast from Bern, the Geneva dance company Alias/Guilherme Botelho, the writer Christian Kracht and the visual artists Fabrice Gygi and Christoph Büchel: Your prestige and international recognition places you with the responsibility to act as conscientious global citizens. You must tell the younger artists who accompany you in this unfortunate adventure where you are going and what this means.

You all have a choice. If you accept the official invitation to participate in the "Swiss Season," the Israeli government will certainly exploit your participation as a sign of support of its policies. Thus you serve as a moral guarantor, which Israel very much needs so that the world will tolerate the blockade of the Gaza strip, the military occupation, the colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the institutionalized discrimination of Palestinian citizens in Israel. Israel needs artists on its sides so as to allow its Apartheid policies against the Palestinians to look civilized.

You all have a choice. The Palestinians ask you to refuse to be accomplices to their oppression and to express your solidarity with their resistance and their struggle for justice and a decent life as a people. By cancelling your participation in the "Swiss Season", you will help increase international pressure on Israel so that its leaders realize that their actions will no longer be tolerated. You can help reinforce the BDS movement that millions of activists and ordinary citizens are building, day by day.

We ask you to follow the moral and humanistic example of Indian artists and gallery owners who recently refused to display their art in the Tel Aviv Museum in the framework of a project similar to the one you have been invited to.[4] We ask you to join artists who have heeded the call for BDS, such as Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno (the Yes Men), Bono, Massive Attack, Tindersticks, Roger Waters, the late poet Gil Scott Heron, film directors Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, writers Henning Mankell, John Berger, Arundhati Roy, Alice Walker, and many other intellectuals such as Naomi Klein, Judith Butler and Slavoj Zizek.

Israel is strong, its deadly acts shake consciences everywhere, but the most powerful states guarantee its impunity. We, standing beside the oppressed, can be as strong by using the most peaceful means of resistance: the citizen's boycott.

BDS Switzerland (<http://www.bds-info.ch> - <http://www.bdsmovement.net>)

Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (<http://www.pacbi.org>)

BOYCOTT! Supporting the Palestinian BDS call from within (<http://www.boycottisrael.info>)

Endorsed by: Basler Frauenvereinigung für Frieden und Fortschritt ; BDS Gruppe Berlin ; British Committee for the Universities of Palestine ; Campagne BDS France ; Collectif Urgence Palestine, Genève ; Collectif Urgence Palestine, Neuchâtel ; Collectif Urgence Palestine, Vaud ; Frauen für den Frieden, Basel ; Frauen in Schwarz, Wien ; free-palestine.ch ; Gesellschaft Schweiz-Palästina/Association Suisse-Palestine ; Gerechtigkeit und Frieden in Palästina, Bern ; Gruppe Solidarität mit der arabischen Demokratiebewegung, Region Bielefeld ; International Jewish Antizionist Network CH ; Kritischen Juden und Israelis, Berlin ; Kritische Jüdische Stimme, Österreich ; Palästina-Solidarität Region Basel

Notes

[1] <http://www.culturescapes.ch/israel> ; <http://israel.culturescapes.ch/culturescapes>

[2] <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>

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

[4] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1679>

Attention : Wide dissemination of this Open Letter allowed.