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[www.bds-info.ch](http://www.bds-info.ch)

[culture@bds-info.ch](mailto:culture@bds-info.ch)

BDS Open Letter to musician Erik Truffaz

## The meaning of boycotting apartheid

Geneva, Basel, January 2, 2013

Dear Sir,

We write to you after several attempts were made to reach out you privately. As proponents of dialogue in the public sphere, we, activists of the Swiss campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), are now addressing you through this open letter.

The BDS campaign was launched in 2005 by a representative range of associations of Palestinian civil society **(1)**. Likewise, Palestinian artists and intellectuals have appealed to their colleagues from around the world to join in the denunciation of the Israeli regime of military occupation to which they are subjected (PACBI) **(2)**.

It came recently to our attention that you are scheduled to perform at the Winter Red Sea Jazz Festival in Eilat. The BDS movement denounces this event as one of the major cultural institutions used by the Israeli regime to polish its image abroad and to divert the attention of public opinion away from its policy of oppression.

For over 60 years Israel carries out a methodical policy of colonization in Palestine. Few remember that the city of Eilat, where you will perform, used to be called Umm Rashrash. Its indigenous inhabitants made refugees by the Israeli army in March 1949 **(3)**. Since then, colonization continues unabated and in defiance of international law. Barely a few weeks ago, in retaliation against the recent UN recognition of the Palestinian right to statehood, Israel announced the construction of 3,000 new illegal housing units in the West Bank around Jerusalem. At the same time, Israel continues the construction of the Wall in the West Bank, imprisoning Palestinians in a giant vise. West Bank residents who love your music simply will not have the right to attend your concert in Eilat. The same goes for millions of Palestinian refugees, banned from returning to their homes. It is even worse For the people of Gaza. Living under blockade since 1995, they suffer numerous large scale military assaults, carried with impunity. As for Palestinians who live in Israel, they are subject to special laws that make them second-class citizens. A growing number of them are deprived of their residence permit and are pushed into the occupied territories. This is what apartheid is, a political system that qualifies as a crime against humanity under international law **(4)**.

It is to this policy that more and more artists and intellectuals are now refusing to lend their prestige and talent: Natacha Atlas, Judith Butler, Brian Eno, Naomi Klein, Mike Leigh, Annie Lennox, Ken Loach, Massive Attack, Maxi Jazz, the Pixies, Cat Power, Carlos Santana, the late Gil Scott Heron, Snoop Dog, Alice Walker, Roger Waters, Cassandra Wilson, etc., and most recently Stevie Wonder.

In 2012, several artists scheduled to perform in the Eilat Jazz Festival canceled their participation, among

**BDS Suisse, Case 4070, 4002 Bâle**

them Tuba Skinny, who also gave a comprehensive explanation of the reasoning behind their decision **(5)**. This year, the British quartet Portico canceled his participation in the festival, urging other musicians to join them **(6)**.

In Switzerland, more than 170 artists and cultural professionals expressed in 2011 their refusal to participate in such promotional activities for the State of Israel as long as it does not respect the human rights of the Palestinian people. Among those who pledged this commitment one counts among others Pascal Auberson, Fabienne Berger, Jean-Luc Bideau, La Gale, Claude Goretta, Francis Reusser, La Ribot, François Rochaix, and Alain Tanner **(7)**.

For many fans, your artistic career reflects a humanistic approach. We are certain that you can understand the aspiration of the Palestinian people for justice, freedom and equality. That is why we believe that you are capable of hearing this call to boycott, a peaceful form of pressure aimed at making Israeli society aware that the policies undertaken in its name are intolerable in a state that wishes itself civilized.

Please do not hesitate to contact us using the address below

Sincerely.

**BDS-ch**

#### Notes

- (1)** [website of the BDS \(Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions\) campaign](#)
- (2)** website of the Palestinian [Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel \(PACBI\)](#)
- (3)** [Israel's Military Government \(1949-1966\)](#), on the website of BADIL (Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights)
- (4)** [Separate and Unequal: Israeli Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in The Occupied Palestinian Territories](#) (Human Rights Watch, December 2010); [Russell Tribunal on Palestine](#) (South Africa November 2011); Recommendations of the [UN committee for the elimination of racial discrimination on Israel](#) (CERD/C/ISR/CO/14-16, April 2012).
- (5)** [Tuba Skinny](#) Explains Why They Cancelled Their Gig in Israel (2011)
- (6)** Act! Congratulate [Portico Quartet](#) on the Decision to cancel Israel Performance (December 2012)
- (7)** [« Nous refusons d'être complices »](#). Déclaration of Artists in Switzerland in response to the Palestinian appeal for boycott and solidarity (2011)