

COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS,
ACADEMICS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF WORLD
ORGANIZATIONS,
ATTENDEES AND MEMBERS, THE "PEACE" PROGRAM,
BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE, 2005-02-26/27.

A paper was passed around yesterday by an academic group calling for a boycott of Israeli academics and institutions, as a suggested means of generating pressure against Israel with a view to ending the injustice suffered by the Palestinian people.

As a group of Palestinian academics belonging to the Palestinian Campaign for Peace and Democracy (HASHD) –see www.hashd.org , we would like to put before you our own thoughts on this controversial subject, so that the point of view of "the other side" to this debate may be heard.

Our vision for the ending of injustice is predicated on a final settlement which will ensure the end of occupation which began in 1967, the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a real and immediate solution to the refugee tragedy. We are as cognizant of and affected by the injustices suffered by the Palestinian people as any other Palestinian group or movement.

However, being also cognizant of the political and social dynamics of our "enemy", and the win-win nature of the solution we propose, we believe that it is our national duty to wage a conscious campaign which seeks to "win over" as many Israelis to our point of view as we can. WE ARE INFORMED BY THE PRINCIPLE THAT WE SHOULD SEEK TO WIN ISRAELIS OVER TO OUR SIDE, NOT TO WIN AGAINST THEM. Therefore, informed by this national duty, we believe it is in our interest to BUILD BRIDGES, NOT WALLS; TO REACH OUT TO THE ISRAELI ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS, NOT TO IMPOSE ANOTHER RESTRICTION OR "DIALOGUE-BLOCK" ON OURSELVES.

Our point of departure is that WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR, and RIGHT IS ON OUR SIDE. By engaging the Israeli academic community, we manage to make Israeli academics side with us against the restrictions imposed by their army on our own academic lives. We seek to win friends because Israel's posture towards us *can only be transformed from the inside.*

WE PUT OUR POINT ACROSS AS WE ENGAGE: WE DO NOT REINFORCE THE BLINDNESS AND DEAFNESS THAT EXISTS BY REFUSING TO ENGAGE. We win by co-option, not by further alienation.

Furthermore, we believe that Palestinian Institutions of Higher Learning should indeed play a leading role in society. Such a role, especially in the midst of understandable Palestinian rage and anger, should be to help guide national policy and public attitudes towards employing those means which might facilitate the end of injustice, and to avoid the employment of those means which can only be of further devastating effect. Your conference yesterday, having addressed the moral and leadership role of our Academic Institutions in our respective civil societies, should perhaps have underpinned the claimed moral voice of Academia by addressing squarely and courageously the immorality of actions taken by either side (including the suicide-bombing of a Tel-Aviv night-club), and condemned all such actions indifferently, as a means of highlighting human values which do not know national or religious borders, and which Academics and Academic institutions should surely uphold. In sum, we do not wish Europe or the world to become an extension of the Israeli-Palestinian battle-ground: we wish that our (pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian) friends there help us end this battle by instituting peace amongst themselves, and together work towards an equitable political solution for us here as the one we propose.

The day may yet come when peace will have to be imposed, but a rational peace based on mutual interests is clearly more stable and lasting. Our aim should therefore be to rally more people behind a consensual peace. Potential costs to continued occupation and the rule of force should by all means be made clear; but the genuine desire for a just peace as well as the rule of reason should be what primarily define our approach.

Finally, we wish to thank all of you who are seeking to help end the Palestinian plight. Being committed to free speech, we welcome and appreciate all points of view. We believe ours expresses the Voice of Reason, and that of many Palestinian academics and free thinkers. A real Palestinian voice for peace, for a future of hope exists. We must CREATE that peace on every front, including that of Academia.

Palestinian Academics

The Palestinian Campaign for Peace and Democracy/HASHD

PALESTINE 27TH FEBRUARY 2005