

Students in Palestine Education under Occupation and Apartheid

The continuing destruction of the Palestinian education system by Israeli occupation and apartheid is not only an attack on the lives of individuals but threatens the development of the whole of Palestinian society. The obstacles put in the way of Palestinian youth accessing educational facilities and obtaining education and knowledge that can contribute to them and their people living in dignity and freedom are part of Israel's apartheid policies. The Occupation systematically fragments society and exploits Palestinians as cheap and dependent labour in the sweatshops of Israeli or World Bank created industries. Palestinian youth seeking a future denied them by the Occupation are thus left with two options: resistance or exile, increasing the number of Palestinian refugees..

The right to education is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and other international agreements and declarations. Students are the future of society, the potential leadership of tomorrow and the backbone of today's struggle – this is why they are targeted for particular assault by the Israeli Occupation.

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Background

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, discrimination against Palestinian students has been a key element of its project of undermining the Palestinian struggle for justice and freedom in their homeland.

Since 1948 Palestinians under Israeli control have been faced with a racist and repressive education system that is an integral part of the Occupation:

- textbooks redesign history and reality according to the myths of Zionism which claim divine rights over this land and inherently legitimize the expulsion of the Palestinian people and the second class status of Palestinians within their homeland.
- universities have structurally racist admission policies.
- most lecturers are reservists for the occupation.
- academic institutions produce the research, arguments, and new leaders for the Occupation, as well as serving as the scientific centers where weapons and technology are developed for use against Palestinians.
- Israeli universities keep investments and campuses in the expanding settlements within the West Bank.
- in some cases, universities have passed out flyers to international students warning them to stay away from Palestinian localities inside the Green Line.

In the West Bank and Gaza, occupied since 1967, there are today 11 universities, 5 university colleges and 25 community colleges. These Palestinian universities had already become sites of resistance in the 1970s to the Occupation's aims of dispossession and exile. For this reason they have since their foundation been a target of the Occupation.

Soon after the start of the first Intifada in 1987 Apartheid Israel closed down all educational institutions in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians resisted the criminalization of education by holding underground classes which in turn became the target of repression.

During the 'peace process' after 1993 Palestinians were banned from traveling between the West Bank and Gaza and entering Jerusalem without special mili-

tary permits. Staff and students continued to suffer arbitrary arrest, torture, deportation and bureaucratic obstacles at the hands of the Occupation.



Since September 2000

With the start of the second Intifada Palestinian educational institutions once again bore the full brunt of the Occupation's military attacks:

- 803 children have been killed and 450 remain in detention.
- over 300 schools have been damaged by Occupation military attacks.
- Bir Zeit university was sealed by a military checkpoint for 2 1/2 years between 2001-2004.
- In 2003 Hebron University and the Palestine Polytechnic University were closed for 6 and 3 months respectively.
- There are now over 700 checkpoints and other military obstacles in the West Bank.
- Schools and universities are frequently closed during military invasions and turned into military bases.

The Impact of the Wall

Since 2002 the Israeli Occupation has been constructing a 730 km long Wall, annexing almost half of West Bank land. The Wall encircles Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank turning them into isolated Bantustans and ghettos. The Wall regime is creating a system of gates and permits that imprisons people in the villages and separates them from their land, jobs, health care

and educational facilities. It enables the Occupation to annex Jerusalem, most of the water resources and the fertile agricultural land in the Jordan Valley.

The Wall was declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in July 2004 but Apartheid Israel refuses to implement international law and continues to construct the Wall with impunity.

The Wall with its regime of checkpoints and other military obstacles has severely restricted the type of education available to Palestinians. Due to difficulty passing checkpoints most students now have to study at the university closest to their home, or rent accommodation at great expense.

Some of the most oppressive strategies of the Occupation are:

Gates: many students live behind gates of the Wall which are opened only at specific hours of the day; they inevitably miss classes or are forced to wait a long time until they can start their classes or reach home.

Harassment and humiliation: students are especially targeted by the occupation at checkpoints, they are routinely held for hours, forced to take off their clothes or simply denied passage. The same holds for professors who are humiliated in front of their students.

Immobilization: access takes an unbearably long time as routes are blocked by the wall, Jewish-only roads and checkpoints; eg. from Ramadin to Qalqiliya it takes 10 mins on foot, but now involves 3 checkpoints and takes 1 hour, if students are not detained for hours at the checkpoint.

Genderized violence: many women have stopped attending higher education if they don't have the financial means to rent a flat as soldiers harass them and routinely infringe upon their religious beliefs.

Specific targeting of schools and universities includes:

- The military frequently attacks schoolchildren at Anata schools, where the Wall ran for a whole year through the playground. Rising media attention induced the Occupation to move it a few meters away from the school, maintaining the same results of land theft and siege.

- at Ras Tire in Qalqiliya district the Wall runs around the school.
- Qalqiliya girls school is surrounded by the Wall and a sniper tower. In the winter, rain-water, blocked from draining, floods the entire first floor.
- Khadouri college (Tulkarem) has been closed for one month continuously. The Wall cuts through the courtyard of the college and a military camp of the Occupation borders the Wall in front of the college. In 2003 the college was used for several months as a military base and still is regularly occupied by the Occupation forces.
- in July 2006 a missile from an Occupation Apache helicopter destroyed a building of the Islamic University in Gaza.
- the 8-metre Wall outside the Al Quds university campus in the east of Jerusalem cuts it off from 36% of its students who live on the other side.

In 2006/7 many students did not even attempt to travel to university due to the difficulties they experienced passing checkpoints. Especially in the north of the West Bank where the ghettoization project is almost complete, many students were unable to take their exams during July as they couldn't reach their campuses.

Increasing poverty (64% in the West Bank and 78% in Gaza) has created further difficulties for students to pay their fees.

Further examples of repression and occupation include:

- in April 2006 a student lost her eye in Nablus after being shot by a soldier
- in April and May 2006 the Occupation invaded Bir Zeit interrupting university elections and repeatedly firing at the students within the campus.
- in March 2006 a professor from An-Najah university, Nablus was arrested and detained for 6 months without charge.
- Bir Zeit student and human rights worker Ziyad Hmeidan has been in detention without being charged for almost two years.
- in January 2007, Abir, a 10 year old girl was killed by the Occupation forces while leaving school in Anata.

What can you do?

As part of the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Apartheid Israel the academic boycott calls upon universities, academic institutions, students and scholars to stop cooperation with their Israeli counterparts within all institutional frameworks. Israeli academic institutions and scholars are not only instrumental in perpetuating and teaching Israeli racist and colonial ideologies and repressing internal dissent, but are also places where the theories, plans, and projects of Israeli Occupation and Apartheid are elaborated and intellectually supported. The academic boycott asks student movements and the international academic community to take up their responsibility as intellectual leaders to uphold and promote the ideals of justice, freedom, and equality and to oppose occupation and colonial apartheid policies such as those inflicted upon the Palestinian people.

For example, in response to the July 2005 call from over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations for an international and comprehensive campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Apartheid Israel, the British lecturers' union the AUT passed a resolution supporting the academic boycott in [month] 2005 followed in May 2006 by another British lecturers' union, NAFTHE, with a similar motion.

Academic and student boycotts can take various forms:

- **Stopping or refusing joint academic and research projects with Israeli institutions**
- **Suspending all forms of funding and subsidies to Israeli academic institutions**
- **Refusing to participate in conferences organized or hosted by, or involving, Israeli academic institutions**
- **Refusing to contribute research and studies to Israeli academic institutions or publications**
- **Promoting divestment and disinvestment of international academic institutions from Israel and from companies supporting Israeli apartheid.**