

BACBI, Press release, February 24, 2020: “We Are Ashamed to Be Belgian”

Under heavy Israeli pressure in Jerusalem and Brussels, the Belgian Representation in the Security Council, which currently holds the presidency of the Council, recently decided to withdraw an invitation to the well-known Palestinian NGO 'Defense for Children International - Palestine' for a briefing on the Middle East at the Council's February 24 session. As Belgian academics, artists and cultural workers, we are ashamed of this cowardly and irresponsible behaviour by our country. Just a few days ago, in occupied East Jerusalem, little Malek Issa, 9 years old, was shot in the face by an Israeli policeman for no reason on returning from school (see video images). The boy lost his left eye and, if he survives, will possibly be completely blind for the rest of his life. This crime against a child is only the latest in a very long series of wilful and systematic acts of child abuse committed by Israeli security forces in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) since 1967. Between 2000 and this year, 2,141 children were killed across the OPTs, while not being involved in hostilities.

The NGO DCI-P is one of the human rights organizations that have been committed to protecting Palestinian children in the OPTs from Israeli violence, in the streets but also in Israeli police stations and prisons, for almost 20 years. Israel is the only country in the world, incidentally, where children, if they happen to be Palestinian, are tried in a military court. Contributing to the discrediting of such a necessary organization in order to please a violent colonial regime (according to the Israeli ambassador to Belgium, of course, DCI-P is "an NGO linked to terror") is a downright disgrace to our country. The claim that the cancellation "merely" constitutes a postponement (meanwhile the "briefing" had already been degraded to "closed consultations", meaning that DCI-P's senior advisor, Mr Brad Parker, would not be able to address the Council) is hardly credible in the light of successful Israeli pressure (whoever gives in to intimidation once, will do so again next time).

As Brussels, Flemish and Walloon citizens, we are deeply ashamed of our country. We demand the immediate revocation of this unacceptable decision by the Belgian Representation, as well as assurances from our Minister of Foreign Affairs that Belgium, during its presidency of the Security Council, will henceforth always be on the side of those who defend human rights and international treaties, not only with words but also with actions.

Prof. Karel Arnaut (KU Leuven), Chokri Ben Chikha (Director/performer, KASK/Faculty of Fine Arts, University College Ghent), Lucas Catherine (auteur), Prof. Patrick Deboosere (VUB), Prof. Lieven De Caeter (KU Leuven), Em. Prof. Herman De Ley (UGent), Em. Prof. Marc De Meyere (UGent), Prof. Serge Deruette (UMons), Lieve Franssen (dirigent Brussels Brecht-Eislerkoor), Carl Gydé (Managing Director CAMPO), Prof. Perrine Humblet (ULB), Joris Iven (dichter), Prof. Hon. Marc Jacquemain (ULiège), Rachida Lamrabet (author), Em.Prof. Madeline Lutjeharms (VUB), Marijke Pinoy (actress), Mong Rosseel (musician and theatre producer), Prof. Hon. Christiane Schomblond (ULB), Dr. Nozomi Takahashi (UGent), Prof. Karin Verelst (VUB).

BACBI – Belgian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (694 endorsers),
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