



## Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign

18 Capel Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

++353 (0)1 8727798

info@ipsc.ie

www.ipsc.ie

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### Please don't dance for Apartheid Israel

*An Coimisiun Le Rinci Gaelach,  
Suite 238, The Capel Building  
Mary's Abbey, Dublin*

18/06/2015

To whom it concerns,

We are writing to you because we have been made aware that the Coimisiun Le Rinci Gaelacha (CLRG) is involved in promoting an Irish dancing event – the Israeli Feis – set to take place in Israel this August 15<sup>th</sup>. Indeed, the CLRG has responded to inquiries about this promotion by saying that it “does not and will not make any comment on national or international political matters ... The objective of An Coimisiún is to preserve and promote Irish Dancing, including step dancing, céilí dancing and other team dancing, and also to promote the use of the Irish Language”.

The CLRG may not be aware that in 2005 over 200 Palestinian civil society, trade union, faith and artistic groups called for a comprehensive boycott, including a cultural boycott, of Israel and Israeli institutions until Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian lands and abides fully by its commitments under international law. We enclose the full text of the call separately, along with a similar call from the Palestinian Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) and a section from a new booklet produced by our colleagues in Artists For Palestine UK called ‘The Case for a Cultural Boycott of Israel’.

We in the IPSC, as supporters of this Palestinian-led movement in Ireland, ask you to heed this call for a cultural boycott of the state of Israel coming from the oppressed people of Palestine by ceasing your support and promotion of this event. With regard to the specific part of the above mentioned CLRG statement that says that “does not and will not make any comment on national or international political matters”, this is simply not an adequate response to those of us who – like the Israeli state itself (see below) – see culture and political matters as being entwined. Such a statement does not absolve the CLRG in any way from its promotion of an event in an Apartheid state, and we appeal to you to reconsider this stance. Furthermore, whether or not CLRG “makes any comment”, comment will most certainly be made *on its behalf* by the Israeli state, which uses all such cultural events to whitewash, or in this case ‘greenwash’, its occupation and war crimes.

That culture and the fight against oppression are inextricably linked is recognised by the more than 500 Irish creative and performing artists that have already signed up to the Irish Artists’ Pledge to Boycott Israel, including musicians like Donal Lunny, Frances Black, Andy Irvine, Sharon Shannon, Damien Dempsey, Róisín Elsafty and Paul Brady, and Irish dancers like Colin Dunne, Declan McHale and Seosamh O Neachtain. In 2011 the renowned artist Robert Ballagh, set designer for Riverdance and endorser of the boycott, refused to join the Riverdance tour in Israel and instead donated his royalties to the Irish Ship to Gaza. These artists join a growing list of international artists like **Roger Waters, Lauryn Hill, Ken Loach, Mira Nair, Nigel Kennedy, Cat Power and Elvis Costello** who have refused to perform in Israel as an act of solidarity with the occupied and besieged Palestinian people.



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### Why a boycott?

We are asking the CLRG to join with these artists and not to allow yourselves to become part of a cultural whitewashing of Israel's apartheid regime which routinely kills, maims and persecutes the Palestinians whose lives it controls. Whatever the CLRG's intentions may be, the fact is that the Israeli state seeks to use cultural events to 'normalise' the violence of decades of military occupation and domination. As the Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in 2005, for Israel "culture is a propaganda tool of the first rank, and I do not differentiate between propaganda and culture." Another Israeli foreign office official, Arye Mekel, remarked that culture was way of "show[ing] Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war" and occupation.

Israel is a frequent and flagrant violator of international law and human rights norms, and regularly commits war crimes. Just last year in a brutal assault on Gaza, Israel killed over 2,200 Palestinians, the vast majority of them civilians, including more than 500 children. In a human rights report following this attack, Defence for Children International said that it "found overwhelming and repeated evidence of international humanitarian law violations committed by Israeli forces. These included direct attacks on children, and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilian homes [and] schools".

### Israel's attacks on Palestinian culture

Not even Palestinian culture is spared the injustice of Israeli occupation – indeed traditional indigenous culture, including Palestine's famed Dabke step-dance, is a frequent target of Israeli aggression. For example, last year Israeli military forces arrested and imprisoned Lina Khattab, an 18-year-old Palestinian student Dabke dancer with the world renowned El-Funoun Palestinian Popular Dance Troupe. Khattab was sentenced to six months in prison, three years on probation, and a \$1,500 fine. The only evidence used against her in court was the testimonies of the three Israeli police who arrested her. No independent proof was provided. While in prison Lina told her mother that, like thousands of other Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, she was "enduring harsh conditions and interrogation methods" and had been subject to "extreme beatings" by Israeli soldiers. Lina was eventually released several days ago.

Last year we in Ireland were privileged to be visited by the Dabke dancers of the Lajee Cultural Centre in Bethlehem's Aida refugee camp. However, before they were allowed by Israeli occupation forces to leave Palestine, 20-year-old dancer Mohammad Abu Aker and the Centre's director, Mohammad Al Azraq, were arrested and imprisoned, preventing them from travelling as planned. Prior to this, Mohammad had already been imprisoned twice, and shot twice by the Israeli military.

The Lajee Center and its dancers are frequent targets of the Israeli occupation, as this report shows:

"At 2 pm, the Lajee Senior Dabkeh Troupe (15-20 years old) had their regular Dabkeh practice. When the children and the youth tried to leave the center to their houses around 4 pm, they were trapped in the center because the Israeli soldiers fired tear gas continuously into the camp. A few minutes later, ten heavily armed soldiers stormed the center. A member of the dance troupe was handcuffed while others had to show their identity cards. Together with the volunteers, the children were locked in the library. Our staff remained firm in the face of the soldiers to protect our children; about half an hour later, the soldiers left. Even though we were able to keep the children

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physically unharmed, they were deeply affected by this experience". – *'Between Normal and Abnormal: A Day in Aida Camp', Kholoud Al-Ajarma, The Palestine Chronicle, 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2014*

These are just two of literally countless examples – from imprisoning poets, musicians, actors and theatre directors, to banning literature festivals to legally suppressing Palestinian historical narratives - of how Israel regularly violates Palestinian cultural rights.

Every cultural event that attended by international artistic and cultural figures, or promoted by international organisations like the CLRG, that is staged within Israel plays a small part in erasing the memories of such crimes and violations, and the guilt of their perpetrators, from our collective consciousness.

### **Listen to the voices of the oppressed**

Famed anti-Apartheid activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu said last year that the conflict's solution will "come from that nonviolent toolbox we developed in South Africa in the 1980s, to persuade the government of the necessity of altering its policies. The reason these tools – boycott, sanctions and divestment – ultimately proved effective was because they had a critical mass of support".

We ask the CLRG to listen to the call of the oppressed, to stand with the people of Palestine, to support Palestinian artists, and to remove you support and for, and cease promoting, the Israeli Feis. We also invite the CLRG sign the Irish Artists' Pledge to Boycott Israel which you can view online at [www.ipsc.ie/pledge](http://www.ipsc.ie/pledge) and become part of this critical mass in support of freedom, justice and equality for the Palestinian people.

We look forward to continuing this dialogue with you.

Yours sincerely,

**Martin O'Quigley**

Chairperson,  
Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign

**PS:** We have been informed by the musician Anthony Davis, who was due to play the music at the Israeli Feis, that he has cancelled his appearance after being contacted by people urging him to do so. Again, we plead with you to act in a similar manner.