

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO,
UNESCO
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 PARIS 07 SP, France

RE: World Science Day for Peace and Development – IPSO Project

22 February 2005

Dear Sir,

The **Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel** (PACBI) wishes to draw your attention to a serious setback to the cause of just peace in Palestine.

Under the noble aim of the World Science Day to “help focus the attention of young people on science and how its goals are congruent with their own aspirations,” another message, which is subtle, yet highly damaging politically, is being communicated. Through supporting the establishment of the Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization (IPSO), UNESCO is actually placing itself at odds with the decision of the **Palestinian Council for Higher Education** which has repeatedly rejected “technical and scientific cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli universities.” Furthermore, by blessing this organization, UNESCO is providing an international cover for a thinly veiled Israeli attempt to improve its image in the world and its status in UN organizations without having to comply with international law, which calls for an end to its occupation, among other forms of its oppression against the people of Palestine.

Innocent activities with noble aims are increasingly used, sometimes with good intentions and often without, to give the impression that if Palestinians and Israelis jointly work on scientific, environmental, cultural or health projects, they somehow make peace more possible or more attainable. Nothing could be further from the truth. Joint projects that claim to be apolitical are the most blatantly politicized since they deliberately disregard the context of colonial oppression and deceptively imply the possibility of achieving peace without addressing the root causes of conflict. They substitute the transient, superficial perception of peace for the real struggle needed to achieve a just peace. The most important of these causes are Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinians territories, its system of racial discrimination against its own Palestinian citizens and its denial of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, in contravention of UN resolutions. Normal relations between peoples can only flourish after oppression has ended, not before and not as a prelude to it. From our perspective, the only joint projects that ought to be encouraged in the process of addressing injustice are those that contribute to combating this injustice.

During apartheid rule in South Africa, the United Nations established a regime of sanctions that eventually brought down the racist regime there and helped create democratic rule. South African scientists, athletes, artists, academics and businesspeople were all subject to boycott then. As we all know, UNESCO played a distinguished and widely commended role in promoting sanctions and various forms of boycott against apartheid South Africa, by organizing no less than eight international conferences and seminars addressing a wide range of topics, including “solidarity,” “resistance against occupation, oppression and apartheid,” “sports boycott,” “sanctions against

racist South Africa” and the “educational needs of the victims of apartheid.”¹ The most significant event that triggered sanctions in that case was the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1971, which denounced South Africa’s occupation of Namibia as illegal. When the ICJ issued a similar advisory opinion on July 9th 2004 condemning Israel’s colonial wall and the entire occupation regime as violating international law, Palestinians, Arabs and indeed all peace-loving people around the globe were hoping that the UN and its institutions would launch appropriate punitive measures against Israel to bring about its compliance with UN resolutions. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, has recently compared Israel’s apartheid to South Africa’s and called for South-Africa style sanctions against the former. Alas, some UN organizations chose instead to overlook or undermine the gravity of Israel’s own “occupation, oppression and apartheid,” thereby encouraging its belligerent flouting of international law.

UNESCO’s support for joint Palestinian-Israeli projects that completely ignore the reality of occupation and oppression on the ground is therefore disappointing. Moreover, it legitimizes the attempt to convey a false perception of the possibility of peaceful coexistence and scientific cooperation *despite* oppression, rather than promoting all efforts to *end* this oppression.

Since Israeli academic institutions (mostly state controlled) and the vast majority of Israeli scientists and academics have either contributed directly to maintaining, defending or otherwise justifying their state’s oppression of the Palestinians, or have been complicit in this oppression through their silence, we feel that the international community, led by the UN and its organizations, ought to call for boycotts and sanctions against Israeli academic and scientific institutions.

In the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice, we, Palestinian academics and intellectuals, call upon UNESCO to immediately withdraw its support for IPSO and any other similar effort that assists, cooperates with or promotes Israeli scientific or cultural institutions until Israel desists from violating Palestinian human rights and fully complies with the pertinent precepts of international law and UN resolutions.

Sincerely,

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
info@BoycottIsrael.ps

Cc:

H. E. Mr **Ahmad Abdelrazek** - Ambassador, Palestinian Representative at UNESCO
H. E. Dr. **Nassif Hitti** - Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to UNESCO
H. E. Dr. **Nasser al-Kidwa** - Ambassador, Permanent Observer of Palestine at the United Nations
Palestinian Council for Higher Education

¹ For a listing of the eight UNESCO sponsored seminars and conferences against apartheid South Africa, please refer to: <http://www.anc.org.za/un/conf.html>