

## After the statement was signed...

### 9<sup>th</sup> September

1. **BDS WORKING GROUP (SOUTH AFRICA)** is the first to respond:  
[https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=210510185679806#!/bdssouthafrica](https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=210510185679806#!/bdssouthafrica)

Dear Friends,

The statement below (and call to action) was issued at yesterday's meeting of the Pietermaritzburg based organization, Church Land Program ([www.churchland.org.za](http://www.churchland.org.za)).

The statement slams the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria that is unashamedly trying to use the upcoming Hilton Arts Festival to further its own agenda. The Israeli Foreign Ministry's involvement in the Hilton Arts Festival can only be interpreted as an attempt to distract from Israel's abuse of human rights, contravention of international law and disregard for UN resolutions. In fact, the deputy director-general for cultural affairs at Israel's Foreign Ministry has said: "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibits [and in] this way show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war."  
([www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html)).

As South African students, lead by the SA Students Congress (SASCO), recently put it: "Israel's image needs no changing; its policies do!" ([www.bdssouthafrica.com/2011/08/blog-post.html](http://www.bdssouthafrica.com/2011/08/blog-post.html))

The drafters of the statement call on all South Africans of good conscience to engage with the Hilton Arts Festival and appeal to the festival not to be used by the Israeli state to further its propaganda agenda.

The statement has been signed by well known academics and land rights activists, both from South Africa and abroad.

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### 12<sup>th</sup> September

1. The biggest local daily paper, **The Witness**, carries the story this morning. This is quite a significant breakthrough to have raised it for public debate in the region (and considering The Witness is a partner with the Festival, there was concern that they may not carry it at all. Perhaps not surprisingly, their editor nails his colours to mast defending the Festival though).

#### **Protesters threaten to boycott Hilton arts week**

12 Sep 2011, Estelle Sinkins

REPRESENTATIVES of South African grassroots movements, civil society organisations and academics have condemned a decision by the organisers of The Witness Hilton Arts Festival to stage three plays from Israel — The Timekeepers, Volunteer Man and My First Sony – at the event which runs from September 16 to 18.

In a letter sent to The Witness and the organisers the signatories, who had been attending a Church Land Programme event in Pietermaritzburg, said the festival is in danger of “irrevocably tarnishing” its image by undermining the Palestinian campaign for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel, launched in Ramallah in 2004.

The boycott, which is supported by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, was launched against Israeli academic and cultural institutions to pressure the country into withdrawing from lands occupied in 1967; removing all its colonies in those lands; agreeing to United Nations resolutions about the restitution of Palestinian refugees’ rights; and dismantling its system of apartheid.

The signatories urge the festival organisers to pull the productions from the programme; for sponsors and partners to protest the decision and to withdraw their support should the decision not be changed; for cultural workers and artists to support the boycott; and the public to pressure the organisers to reverse the decision, protest at the festival, and boycott, if not the whole festival, then at least the Israeli plays.

Responding to the letter, Iain McMillan, chairperson of The Witness Hilton Arts Festival, said that while they have taken note of the objections raised to the inclusion of the plays on the programme, the organisers want to make it “absolutely clear that the inclusion of these works in no way reflects the festival’s endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies”.

He added: “The three plays have all previously been presented at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown: two in 2010, and the third in 2011. That festival is a prime source of material for The Witness Hilton Arts Festival, and the works were selected for this year’s programme on account of their artistic merit and interesting subject matter.

“My First Sony focuses on the challenges facing children growing up in a dysfunctional family; Volunteer Man is about a man dying of Aids in New York and is concerned with voluntary euthanasia; and The Timekeepers is a Holocaust story with a strong anti-fascist message. It has always been the festival’s intention to provide our audiences with challenging drama, reflecting our belief that art in a democracy should transcend political agendas and deal with human issues. The three plays on which attention is now being focused qualify in terms of that intention, and convey messages appropriate for our young democracy. Finally, we need to reiterate the Hilton Festival’s commitment to freedom of expression.”

His words were echoed by Yves Vanderhaegen, acting editor of The Witness, who said:

“The Witness supports an open exchange of views that contributes to a better understanding of the human condition and encourages people to go along to the festival.”

McMillan refuted claims that the organisers are backing state-funded plays, adding that the Embassy of Israel and the ambassador, Dov Segev-Steinberg, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Victor Gordon, the head of Tararam (South Africa Israel Culture Fund), had only helped in paying for some of the costs involved in bringing the plays to South Africa.

“The company is being paid to perform by the festival organisers on the same basis as any other participants,” he added.

[ENDS]

## **13<sup>th</sup> September**

1. The **Media Review Network** issued a subsequent statement as follows: (at: <http://www.mediareviewnet.com/>):

### **Hilton Arts Festival Staging Israeli Plays**

Monday, 12 September 2011

The Media Review Network is deeply perturbed that 'The Witness Hilton Arts Festival' scheduled for Pietermaritzburg during 16 to 18 September, 2011 will be staging three Israeli plays.

This is in clear violation of an international call by Palestinian victims of Israeli oppression to enforce a boycott regime against the apartheid state.

We are dismayed too that despite calls by South African civil society on the organisers and sponsors of the event to heed the plea for a cultural boycott of Israel, they have opted to dismiss these.

We wish to remind Mr Iain McMillan, the Chairman of 'The Witness Hilton Arts Festival' that by staging plays by Israel, they would be seen to be endorsing the right wing regime and its policies of Occupation, Colonialism and Apartheid.

We call on Mr Iain McMillan as the Chairman of this event to urgently undertake a review of the merits of incorporating Israeli plays against the backdrop of life-threatening daily violations of human rights by Israel.

If the Hilton Festival is serious about its commitment to deal with human issues, we respectfully urge them to not turn a blind eye to the pain and suffering resulting from decades of human rights violations such as settlement activity, the siege of Gaza, military checkpoints, the Wall, home demolitions and land confiscation - all illegal under International Law!

Unlike these plays, real life drama affects every single Palestinian whose voices are stifled each time Israel attempts to breach the boycott campaign.

Issued by:

Iqbal Jassat - Chairman, Media Review Network

Cell: 083 594 3749

E-mail: [mrn\\_ij@telkomsa.net](mailto:mrn_ij@telkomsa.net)

2. The major Durban morning newspaper, the **Daily News**, has an article today based on the MRN statement:

<http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/row-over-hilton-s-staging-israeli-plays-1.1136821>

**“Row over Hilton’s staging Israeli plays”**, September 13 2011,  
RIZWANA SHEIK UMAR

The three plays – The Time keepers, Volunteer Man and My First Sony – have all been previously presented at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

Chairman of the network, Iqbal Jassat, said: “We are dismayed too that despite calls by South African civil society on the organisers and sponsors of the event to heed the plea for a cultural boycott of Israel, they have opted to dismiss these.

“We wish to remind Iain McMillan, chairman of the Hilton Arts Festival, that by staging plays by Israel, they would be seen to be endorsing the right-wing regime and its policies of occupation, colonialism and apartheid.”

Jassat said the boycott, supported by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, was launched against Israeli academic and cultural institutions to pressure the country into withdrawing from lands occupied in 1967; removing all its colonies in those lands; agreeing to United Nations resolutions about the restitution of Palestinian refugees’ rights and dismantling its system of apartheid.

McMillan said he did not anticipate the sentiments generated by the scheduling of the plays: “The plays were chosen by our artistic director who thought they would be of good value and artistic merit. While we have considerable respect for the boycott campaign, there is nothing sinister about these acts.”

McMillan said the inclusion of these works in no way reflected the festival’s endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies.

“The plays from Israel were selected in good faith in order to enrich the festival programme. Furthermore, the company was being paid to perform by the festival organisers on the same basis as any other participants, said McMillan.  
[ENDS]

3. "Voice of The Cape FM" carries the MRN statement at:

[http://www.vocfm.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1328:hilton-festival-a-concern-mrn&Itemid=123](http://www.vocfm.co.za/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1328:hilton-festival-a-concern-mrn&Itemid=123)

4. "Kairos Southern Africa" carries both statements at: <http://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/>

5. The "Daily News" article is briefly headlined at <http://www.nationalartsfestival.co.za/theatrenews>

## **14<sup>th</sup> September**

1. The **Muslim Judicial Council** issues a statement addressed to the Hilton Festival Director.

[http://www.mjc.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=369:mjc-letter-to-the-whaf-2011&catid=15:press-releases&Itemid=13](http://www.mjc.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=369:mjc-letter-to-the-whaf-2011&catid=15:press-releases&Itemid=13)

13 September 2011

Iain McMillan  
Chairman  
The Witness Hilton Arts Festival

RE : ISRAELI PRODUCTIONS AT THE 2011 WITNESS HILTON ARTS FESTIVAL

The Muslim Judicial Council [MJC] is the largest represented body for the Muslim community in South Africa and has been serving this community for the past 66 years. The MJC is a faith-based organization (FBO), which was established in 1945. It is one of the oldest, most representative and most influential religious organizations in South Africa and enjoys local, national and international credibility.

We note with concern the program content of your upcoming festival and the clarity forwarded by the Witness Hilton Arts Festival in response to objection by the public regarding the inclusion of 3 plays from Israel. We also understand that the choice is based purely on artistic merit and subject matter. However, because we value South African's democracy which is intricately linked with human rights, we cannot condone or support anything that emanates from a State that violates the dignity and human rights of a people. Israel has been declared an Apartheid state that refuses to allow the Palestinian people their basic human rights. As South Africans, we stand by the principles that add value and recognizes the principles that preserves our reputation as a democratic country that holds no association with an Apartheid state.

We have to remind you that during Apartheid in South Africa it was the collective mind of justice seeking citizens who stood in unity against a state that oppressed its people that aided our transformation to this democracy that we proudly affirm. We also remind you that democratic values cannot stand aloof and at a distance in the face of human suffering, because its nature is such that the justice seeking human spirit will always challenge oppression and contribute through boycotts, disinvestment and activism against policies that violates human dignity.

Further, we cannot take lessons from a nation that violates those values that they seek to enrich us with. The play "My First Sony" which focuses on children growing in dysfunctional families, is precisely the crisis that the Palestinians children endure because of Israeli policies, ironically the other two reflects the ideologies such as fascism which is at the heart of Israeli oppression.

We therefore urge you to reflect upon this venture as other South African artists have taken a clear position by distancing themselves from any relations with Israel.

Regards  
Nabeweya Malick  
Public Relations/Media Liaison  
Cell : 083 408 1157

## **15<sup>th</sup> September**

### 1. **Times** article:

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2011/09/14/artist-group-slams-hilton-festival-for-israeli-association>

Artist group slams Hilton Festival for Israeli association  
Times LIVE | 14 September, 2011

The Church Land Program and South African Artists Against Apartheid collective have slammed the Hilton Arts Festival for hosting Israeli plays and accepting funding from the Israeli Embassy. The groups say the festival is allowing itself to be used as an instrument of the Israeli state's agenda.

The festival is due to start Friday, the September 16, but as reported in the Daily News and Natal Witness newspapers, it is currently embroiled in controversy due to its association with the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria.

South African Artists Against Apartheid says: "We fully agree with the Church Land Program statement, that in hosting Israeli plays and accepting funding from the Israeli Embassy, "the [Hilton Arts] festival is in danger of irrevocably tarnishing its image.

“The Israeli Foreign Ministry's involvement in the Hilton Arts Festival can only be interpreted as an attempt to distract from Israel's abuse of human rights, contravention of international law and disregard for UN Resolutions.”

In fact, the collective says, the deputy director-general for Cultural Affairs, at Israel's Foreign Ministry, has said: "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theatre companies, exhibitions [and in] this way show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war."

The chairperson of the Hilton Arts Festival, Mr Iain McMillan, has said that: "the organisers want to make it absolutely clear that the inclusion of [the Israeli] works in no way reflects the festival's endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies."

The groups say McMillan needs to go further.

“Even if Mr McMillan unequivocally distanced the Hilton Arts Festival from Israel's oppressive policies, this is only the first step,” the collective says.

“The next step is to take the side of the oppressed Palestinians, respect their call for a boycott and remove the Israeli Embassy and Israeli plays from its programme entirely. This is what we [oppressed] South Africans expected during the anti-apartheid struggle and this is what Palestinians now expect of us. This is our duty.”

The South African Artists Against Apartheid collective has appealed to the Hilton Arts Festival, “as fellow supporters of art that celebrates peace, questions power, provokes and endeavours to expose injustice, to respect the Palestinian call for boycott”.

[ENDS]

## 2. Letter to **The Witness**

### **Putting pressure on Israel, 15 Sep 2011**

I AM deeply saddened to learn that three plays from Israel will be staged at The Witness Hilton Arts Festival (The Witness, September 12). I commend and congratulate representatives of the South African grass-roots movements, civil society organisations and academics who have condemned the festival organisers for including these plays from Israel. The Israeli regime needs to change its inhumane and repressive policies and end the brutal occupation of Palestinian lands.

According to most human right organisations and justice activists, the academic and cultural boycott is an effective and non-violent way of putting pressure on Israel, and has a real chance of obtaining a change in the policies that contravene international law. This was made clear in the case of South Africa. Israel is clearly seeking political legitimacy and moral recognition, and the world of culture and art should not satisfy this need. Over the years, the United States-led peace plans have failed miserably and it's time to explore a new path for a life of dignity for all in the Holy Land.

Palestinian civil society has on many occasions called for support for the boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign to highlight the struggle of the Palestinian people for freedom, equality and basic human rights.

ABDULLAH SAEED, Pietermaritzburg

[ENDS]

### 3. Letter to Festival sponsor: **Star Hire**

Dear Star Hire,

As a member of the artistic community, as well as a theatre practitioner and an ongoing and avid supporter of independent art festivals, I write to you with grave concerns. It has come to the attention of The South African Artists Against Apartheid Collective that Hilton Arts Festival is affiliated with the Israeli Embassy and that the festival intends to present three Israeli funded theatre works this weekend. We impel you to retract your services and, in the least, distance yourself from the Israeli Embassy that is officially sponsoring the Hilton Arts Festival. We eagerly await your response on this matter.

Kindly,  
Joni Barnard,  
South African Artists Apartheid Collective.

### 4. Statement from **South African Artists against Apartheid**

<http://www.southafricanartistsagainstapartheid.com/>

#### **SA Artist Against Apartheid statement on Hilton Arts Festival**

**15 September 2011**

The South African Artists Against Apartheid Collective officially endorses the letter sent to the organizers of the upcoming Hilton Arts Festival by a meeting of the Pietermaritzburg based organization, Church Land Program.

The festival is due to start this Friday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, but has become embroiled in controversy due to its affiliation with the Israeli embassy in Pretoria.

It was reported in the Natal Witness newspaper that “Representatives of South African grassroots movements, civil society organizations and academics have condemned a decision by the organizers of The Witness Hilton Arts Festival to stage three plays from Israel”, *My First Sony*, *Volunteer Man* and *The Timekeepers*.

Whilst we welcome Iain McMillan's comment (chairperson of The Witness Hilton Arts Festival) that “the organisers want to make it absolutely clear that the inclusion of these works in no way reflects the festival’s endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies” we urge Mr McMillan to go further and remove the Israeli Embassy from its programme entirely. In hosting Israeli plays and accepting funding from the Israeli embassy “the [Hilton Arts] festival is in danger of ‘irrevocably tarnishing’ its image”. Furthermore, McMillan states that, “the company is being paid to perform by the Festival organisers on the same basis as any other participants .” It is important to highlight that the Hilton festival organisers are **producing** these works and therefore have an active choice in the matter. In choosing to be affiliated with the Israeli embassy as well as produce Israeli works, the Hilton Festival directly reflects and endorses the state of Israel and its politics.

For those of us who lived under Apartheid and continue to face its legacy we see many parallels with the treatment of Palestinians. Indeed, the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC), a parastatal supported by the South African government, has released findings that Israel is unequivocally guilty of the crime of Apartheid [1].

Israel was founded and still exists on racist principles and has created the largest refugee population (more than 6 million people) in the world. Israel has consistently flouted international law and has, throughout its over 60 years of military occupation, colonized and annexed more and more of Palestinian land. Today Palestinians have less than what the apartheid regime in South Africa allowed Black South Africans to own in the Homelands or Bantustans. The Israeli state also continues to erect what many refer to as the "Apartheid Wall", despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision in 2004 that it is illegal.

It is in this context that the acceptance of Israeli funding and the producing of Israeli theatre works will constitute active support of an initiative by Israel to 'rebrand' itself. This 'rebranding' campaign, launched after the attack on Gaza in December 2008/January 2009 where more than 1400 Palestinians were massacred [2], is aimed at making Israel appear to be a liberal democracy and to whitewash its ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. The Israeli Foreign Ministry's involvement in the Hilton Arts Festival can only be interpreted as an attempt to distract from Israel's abuse of human rights, contravention of international law and disregard for UN resolutions. In fact, the deputy director-general for cultural affairs at Israel's Foreign Ministry has said: "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibitions [and in] this way show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war." [3]. As South African students, lead by the SA Students Congress (SASCO), recently put it: "Israel's image needs no changing; its policies do!" The Hilton Arts Festival should not be used by the Israeli state to cover-up its pro-apartheid and racist regime.

We acknowledge that the proposed facilitation of the above mentioned theatre works discuss important issues of family, childhood, HIV, anti-fascist movement - issues that all of us and particularly the patrons of an independent arts festival should be interested in. Yet, Israel is guilty of flagrant and ongoing human rights violations in the land it occupies and we cannot and will not skirt around the reality of this. Unless we firmly confront this, as the basis of the ongoing expansion and violence of the state, then we ignore that art is a product of a social context. We ignore that art, as Israel often uses it, is a smokescreen to celebrate a state rather than address and question its human rights violations and racism.

South Africa's most prominent leaders - Kgalema Motlante, Blade Nzimanda, Zwelinzima Vavi, Ahmed Kathrada, Rob Davies, Jeremy Cronin, Ronnie Kasrils, John Dugard, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the late Kader Asmal, to name just a few – have publicly declared that Israel is an apartheid state.

Palestinian artists, theatre practitioners and film makers have little resources, are not able to travel freely and struggle to make the most meager of existences. Palestinian artists themselves are under *de facto* boycott by the Israeli State.

The Palestinian people have called for the international cultural boycott of Israel. The South African Artists Against Apartheid collective calls on *The Hilton Arts Festival* as fellow supporters of art that celebrates peace, art that questions and provokes, art that endeavours to expose injustice. We call on you as patrons who wish to continue to know that the spaces where we enjoy art are not spaces to legitimize apartheid.

**For more information:**

Joni Barnard – [jonibarnard@gmail.com](mailto:jonibarnard@gmail.com), Aslam Bulbulia – [abulbulia@gmail.com](mailto:abulbulia@gmail.com).

[1][http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Media\\_Release-378.phtml](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Media_Release-378.phtml)

[2]<http://www.ochaopt.org/gazacrisis/index.php?section=3>

[3][www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html)

[ENDS]



5. **New Age** article based on statement from South African Artists Against Apartheid collective

[http://www.thenewage.co.za/29000-1010-53-Call to boycott arts festival over Israeli plays](http://www.thenewage.co.za/29000-1010-53-Call%20to%20boycott%20arts%20festival%20over%20Israeli%20plays)

"**Call to boycott arts festival over Israeli plays**", Jasper Shepherd Smith.

The South African Artists Against Apartheid collective has called for people who support the Palestinian cause to boycott this weekend's The Witness Hilton Arts Festival in KwaZulu-Natal because of the inclusion of three Israeli plays. The group says the inclusion is contrary to the cultural and academic boycott agreed upon by some SA artists, academics and public figures. The collective says festival chairperson Iain McMillan's statement that "the inclusion of these works in no way reflects the festival's endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies", is "not enough".

"The next step is to take the side of oppressed Palestinians, respect their call for a boycott and remove the Israeli embassy and Israeli plays from its programme entirely," it said. "This is what we (oppressed) South Africans expected during the anti-apartheid struggle and this is what Palestinians now expect of us. "This is our duty."  
[ENDS]

6. Church Land Programme (CLP) Director, Graham Philpott was interviewed live on **Channel Islam International** this morning.

## **16 September**

1. **Daily News** article, 15th September:

"**Group calls for Israeli plays to be removed from Hilton festival**"

<http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/group-calls-for-israeli-plays-to-be-removed-from-hilton-festival-1.1138105>

### **KAMCILLA PILLAY**

The cause of contention, the three Israeli plays – *The Timekeepers*, *Volunteer Man* and *My First Sony* – have been previously presented at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

Joni Barnard of the collective said that they hoped organisers of the event would remove the plays. "This is what we (oppressed) South Africans expected during the anti-apartheid struggle and this is what Palestinians now expect of us. This is our duty."

Hilton Arts Festival chairman Iain McMillan said earlier this week the plays had been chosen by their artistic director, who thought they would be of "good value". McMillan said at the time the inclusion of these works in no way reflected the festival's endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies. He could not be contacted for further comment. Chairwoman of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies Mary Kluk said calling for the boycott of all things representative of Israel was counterproductive.

### **Conflict**

"Our organisation supports and endorses a two-state solution in which both Palestinians and Israelis can govern the area side by side, with mutual recognition of each other's independence," she said.

There was, she said, much more to Israel than conflict and the plays showed the richness of the culture through art.

Chairman of the Media Review Network, Iqbal Jassat, said numerous organisations had supported its stance against showcasing the plays. “We hope that, through this support, the organisers of the festival will remove the plays from its programme.

Moulana Abdullah Khan of Jamiatul Ulama KZN (also known as the Council of Muslim Theologians) said the organisation believed staging the plays would “support the apartheid state of Israel”. “We hope this will be reconsidered and cancelled by the organisers.”

Muhammed Desai of the Coalition for a Free Palestine said the organisation backed the call made by the Media Review Network and the SA Artists Against Apartheid collective for the festival to respect the Palestinian boycott call. “All peace-loving peoples, and we believe that the Hilton Arts Festival is made up of such people, should respect the call of the oppressed Palestinians. It’s the decent thing to do.”

Spokesman for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign Salim Vally said: “This has little to do with artistic merits and more to do with principles.”  
[ENDS]

2. **The Witness**, Op-Ed piece by **Ismail Mahomed**, 16 September.

[*Note that:* Ismail Mahomed is the Director of the National Arts Festival (Grahamstown). The same three Israeli plays were run at his Festival this year without controversy and without him intervening to even raise the issue as far as I know. Since the CLP statement, there has been significant pressure on him to clarify his position and account for his non-action. This Op-Ed from him does neither - and is presumably an attempt to fudge the direct questions and condone doing pretty much nothing. This is an edited version of his piece – the full article is at: [http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B\\_id%5D=68506](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=68506)]

### **Cultural boycotts**

16 Sep 2011, Ismail Mahomed.

THERE will always be an argument that favours art for art’s sake. In a nation such as ours where a liberation struggle was driven by the slogan, “Culture is a weapon of the struggle”, we are more conscious that art is more than just a commodity. We recognise that one of the greatest potentials of art is its ability to raise our consciousness of one another. Whether it is live theatre, visual art or even a humble form of craft-art with which we engage, we can never escape the compelling questions about how that piece of work is connected to our humanity. Art engages us emotionally, intellectually and socially. Through our engagement with it, we form perspectives that we can use as social and political tools. Live theatre in South Africa, particularly our large archives of protest theatre, will always be a testimony that art can be a powerful political force. ...

Cultural boycotts are not ends in themselves, they are tactics that are used to aid a larger strategy. They have successful results politically, but they also leave behind visible scars on an arts economy and on the intellectual arts resources of a nation. ... All around the world, discussions about a cultural boycott of Israel are often vibrant and hard-lined, but the reality is that in South Africa, much of this discussion has remained within focused activists groups and academia. The South African arts community as a collective has not actively engaged in this debate.

...

There are at least three possible positions that *The Witness* Hilton Arts Festival could take. One is to ignore the criticism and carry on as planned — arguing that art and politics are from different universes. A second position would be to heed the call and cancel the performances. But a third way could be to build on the visit by the touring company by engaging with these artists about the issues in their country and in relation to how we respond to them influenced by our own history.

... At this late stage, it would be more beneficial to engage with the artists about how strongly South Africans feel about the conditions in Israel and Palestine. ... Snapping at arts administrators on the eve of their events is short-sighted. It is a lost opportunity to support the much-needed dialogue for the South African arts sector to engage on how we position our arts festivals in relation to the rest of the world.

• Ismail Mahomed is director of the National Arts Festival. He writes in his personal capacity.

[ENDS]

3. **Channel Islam International**, publishes a report after their radio interview with Graham Philpott (CLP).

[http://www.ciibroadcasting.com/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=7168:sa-stands-up-against-israeli-artists&catid=43:blog&Itemid=111&fontstyle=f-larger](http://www.ciibroadcasting.com/?option=com_content&view=article&id=7168:sa-stands-up-against-israeli-artists&catid=43:blog&Itemid=111&fontstyle=f-larger)

The South African community recently has come out vigorously against the Israeli occupation in Palestine. The boycott action has spread across various cultures and communities who have adopted a strong sense of solidarity with the Palestinian people. According to the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel which was launched in Ramallah in 2004, boycotting Israeli academic and cultural institutions is an urgently needed form of pressure against Israel that can bring about its compliance with international law and the requirements for a just peace.

In conformity with this boycott, The Church Land program, an independent non-profit organisation, has called on the organisers of the Hilton Arts Festival, based in KwaZulu Natal, to prevent any funding or performance from Israelis.

The Hilton Arts Festival is held annually and displays a wide spectrum of art and performances. Festival Director, Sue Clarence, has repeatedly put the spotlight on three productions at this year's festival that are being mounted through support from the Israeli state. She said: "I would also like to draw attention to Roy Horowitz and his actors from Israel with three plays, *The Timekeepers*, *Volunteer Man* and *My First Sony*. Thanks are due to those who made this possible: the Embassy of Israel, the Ambassador - Mr. Dov Segev-Steinberg and the Cultural Attache, Mr. Yaakov Finkelstein; the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Mr Victor Gordon, the head of Tararam ['South Africa Israel Culture Fund'].

The Church Land program has urged the organisers of the event to take various steps against Israel. They have encouraged the Festival organisers to pull the Israeli productions from the Festival programme immediately. Graham Philpott, member of the Church Land program, told Channel Islam International (Cii) that allowing these Israeli productions is ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people. "As a society we need to make this clear for those who suffered in Palestine. We have to act in solidarity with them," Philpott said.

In response to this call for protests, the Hilton arts festival is reported to have said that it is 'only art' and the Church Land Program must respect freedom of expression. They also denied any claim that they are supporters of the Apartheid state of Israel. In conclusion, Philpott noted that they have had overwhelming positive feedback from the public including organisations like the Muslim Judicial Council, The Media Review Network and South African Artists Against Apartheid.

Qaanitah Hunter- Cii NEWS

[ENDS]

4. In an act of extraordinary principle and integrity, **Iain 'EWOK' Robinson, the Durban-based Hip Hop star, has cancelled his performance at this year's Hilton Arts Festival.**

In his letter to the organizers, Robinson says: "I cannot in good conscience willingly participate in any event that enjoys the support and patronage of the Israeli Government. ... [M]y conscience will not allow anything other than for me choose to lead by example. I feel it is my responsibility as a South African who enjoys the democratic rights that were fought for so valiantly by my parents generation of anti-apartheid activists, to participate in the similar Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions of Apartheid Israel. 'Freedom for Palestine is freedom for us all'."

Applauding EWOK's decision, the South African Artists Against Apartheid collective say they "look forward to other such cancellations in the next few days".

Here's the full story as released a few hours ago from SA Artists Against Apartheid:

**BREAKING NEWS: Hip Hop performer cancels Hilton Arts Festival gig – in protest**  
16 September 2011.

Several calls have been made, first by the organization, Church Land Program, to boycott the upcoming Hilton Arts Festival. The calls for boycott come on the grounds of the festival's hosting of three Israeli plays and also accepting funding and support from the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria and the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Iain EWOK Robinson, the Durban based Hip Hop star has cancelled his performance at this year's Hilton Arts Festival - in protest. Below are parts of Iain EWOK Robinson's letter that was sent last night to the organizers of the Hilton Arts Festival explaining why he is cancelling his scheduled gig, "Rapped In truth". The performance was advertised for Saturday at 14h30.

"It is with great difficulty and not without any sadness that I must announce that I will not be performing my show "Rapped In Truth" at this years festival.

"Please believe that this decision was not an easy one to arrive at, and I do not intend it to be a personal judgment in any way on any of you as individuals.

"The reality of the situation is this: I have been contacted today by various Palestinian solidarity organizations who have asked for the following action to be observed. As a signatory of the South African Artists Against Apartheid declaration ([www.southafricanartistsagainstapartheid.com](http://www.southafricanartistsagainstapartheid.com)), in support of the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions of the Apartheid Israeli Government, I cannot in good conscience willingly participate in any event that enjoys the support and patronage of the Israeli Government in any form. I believe that this is an endorsement of the criminal acts of oppression and human rights abuses consistently perpetrated by this entity against the Palestinian people.

It was never my intention to pull out at such a late stage in your preparations, and please believe that I mean no disrespect. However, the full weight of my intended involvement and its ramifications has only become clear to me in the details provided by these organizations today. Given this new knowledge, and after participating in the presentation to Hilton College about the role of Arts in Society, my conscience will not allow anything other than for me choose to lead by example.

I feel it is my responsibility as a South African who enjoys the democratic rights that were fought for so valiantly by my parents generation of anti-apartheid activists, to participate in the similar Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions of Apartheid Israel. "Freedom for Palestine is freedom for us all.

Yours, with respect,  
Iain EWOK Robinson."

The South African Artists Against Apartheid collective warmly welcomes this decision and salutes Iain EWOK Robinson for his clear and principled position. We look forward to other such cancellations in the next few days.

ISSUED BY JONI BARNARD ON BEHALF OF THE SA ARTISTS AGAINST APARTHEID COLLECTIVE

For interviews with the artist: Iain EWOK Robinson - [whatkindkse@hotmail.com](mailto:whatkindkse@hotmail.com)

For comments from the SA Artists Against Apartheid: Joni Barnard - [jonibarnard@gmail.com](mailto:jonibarnard@gmail.com) - 082 780 9758

Photos and more information will be available at:

[www.southafricanartistsagainstapartheid.com/2011/09/hilton-arts-festival\\_5573.html](http://www.southafricanartistsagainstapartheid.com/2011/09/hilton-arts-festival_5573.html)

5. Expanded story on **EWOK's** action

<http://www.africagateway.com/2011/09/16/ewok-withdraws-hilton-arts-festiva/>

“EWOK withdraws from Hilton Arts Fest”

16 September 2011

Iain EWOK Robinson\*, the South African Hip Hop artist, has cancelled his scheduled performance at this year’s Hilton Arts Festival. The festival is due to start today.

EWOK wrote to festival organizers last night:

“I cannot in good conscience willingly participate in any event that enjoys the support and patronage of the Israeli Government in any form. I believe that this is an endorsement of the criminal acts of oppression and human rights abuses consistently perpetrated by this entity against the Palestinian people.

“I feel it is my responsibility as a South African who enjoys the democratic rights that was fought for so valiantly by my parents’ generation of anti-apartheid activists, to participate in the similar Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions [campaign] of Apartheid Israel.”

The Coalition for a Free Palestine (CFP) commends and salutes EWOK’s position which should be an example for all other artists.

EWOK is part of the MC duo, Illuminating Shadows, and has represented South Africa in several major competitions including the African Hip Hop Indaba, World Hip Hop Slampionship, Poetry International Festival, and Poetry Africa.

### *Accepting Israeli funding*

This year’s Hilton Arts Festival has been marred by controversy over its collaboration with, and accepting of money and support from, the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Citing financial woes, Hilton Arts Festival director, Sue Clarence, explained to the Witness Newspaper: “[R]elative to other festivals in South Africa, we’re still really underfunded... we need old-fashioned cash money.”

Sue Clarence should be reminded that the cash strapped Apartheid government also turned to Israel (the apartheid government's only remaining partner) during the 90s for "old-fashioned cash money". This is a collaboration that we want to walk away from, not re-enforce – at least until Israel, like South Africa, democratizes, ends its apartheid policies and oppression of Palestinian people.

### *Israeli Boycott*

The progressive Christian and land-rights organization, Church Land Program, was the first group to call on artists to boycott the festival. In a public statement the organization said that by hosting Israeli plays and accepting funding from the Israeli Embassy, "the [Hilton Arts] festival is in danger of irrevocably tarnishing its image".

Joni Barnard from the SA Artist Against Apartheid collective went further, stating that the "Israeli Foreign Ministry's involvement in the Hilton Arts Festival can only be interpreted as an attempt to distract from Israel's abuse of human rights, contravention of international law and disregard for UN Resolutions."

In fact, the Deputy Director-general for Cultural Affairs, at Israel's Foreign Ministry, Arye Mekel has said: "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibitions [and in] this way show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war."

EWOK now joins the growing list of artists and cultural workers who have cancelled or refused to perform in Israel or at Israeli funded events. These artists include: the legendary, Gil Scott Heron; Pink Floyd front-man, Roger Walters; folk singer, Pete Seeger; Bono of U2; actors Meg Ryan and Dustin Hoffman; Elvis Costello, Carlos Santana and groups such as Faithless, Massive Attack and the Pixies.

The boycott of Israel movement is a peaceful and non-violent international campaign to isolate Israel until it abides by international law and basic human rights principles. It was launched in 2005 and is inspired and modeled on the successful anti-apartheid boycott of South Africa and the civil rights movement in the USA.

[ENDS]

## **20 September**

### **1. Report on the Hilton Arts Festival**

<http://news.artsmart.co.za/2011/09/report-on-witness-hilton-arts-festival.html>

Report by Billy Suter dated September 19. (Courtesy of The Mercury)

It was a case of the show must go on at the 19th annual Hilton Arts Festival at Hilton College which, although rocked by political objections to three Israeli plays being included on the festival bill, went off without a hitch at the weekend. Making use of a stronger security presence, the organisers rated the three-day event a big success, with 82 percent of tickets sold by late yesterday afternoon, including near sellouts for the three Israeli plays – *The Timekeepers*, *Volunteer Man* and *My First Sony*. During the final bows of the first staging of the festival's flagship production, *The Timekeepers*, a drama centred on growing friendship in a concentration camp, one of the three cast members, Roy Horovitz, thanked the audience for their support and, to cheers, and applause, commended the festival committee for separating culture and politics.

In the days leading up to the festival, organisations had united to call for the Israeli plays to be withdrawn from the festival. The South African Artists Against Apartheid collective, Media Review Network and Coalition For a Free Palestine were among them. Then, on Thursday night, Durban actor, rapper and graffiti artist Ian “Ewok” Robinson informed the festival organisers he was pulling out of his scheduled solo performances the following morning as he had signed the South African Artists Against Apartheid declaration in support of the Palestinian call for a boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against the “apartheid Israeli government”. If festival organisers feared other artists might follow suit, this did not happen and, in the case of Robinson’s cancelled performances, Durban actors Janna Ramos-Violante and Darren King were quick to step in to improvise entertainment for the 200 schoolchildren who had booked to see Robinson perform, said festival artistic director Sue Clarence.

The festival organisers decided to present the Israeli shows because, said festival chairman Iain MacMillan: “we need to reiterate the Hilton Festival’s commitment to freedom of expression.” “We need to make it absolutely clear that the inclusion of these works in no way reflects the festival’s endorsement, or otherwise, of the state of Israel or its policies,” MacMillan states on the festival website. He added that the three plays had all previously been presented at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown: two in 2010, and the third in 2011. That festival is a prime source of material for the Hilton Arts Festival, and the works were selected for this year’s programme on account of their artistic merit and interesting subjects, he added.

“It has always been the festival’s intention to provide our audiences with challenging drama, reflecting our belief that art in a democracy should transcend political agendas and deal with human issues. The three plays on which attention is now being focused qualify in terms of that intention, and convey messages appropriate for our young democracy,” said MacMillan. “The plays from Israel were selected in good faith to enrich the festival programme. Furthermore, the company is being paid to perform by the festival organisers on the same basis as any other participants.”

Good weather added to the success of the festival which, as usual, offered a wide variety of theatre, music, song, arts, craft and lectures, and a fine mix of local and imported works. Next year’s festival, being the 20th, would be a special four-day event said Clarence, who is negotiating for a British comedian to be a headline attraction.

[ENDS]

## **2. Festival Shame**

[http://vocfm.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=itemlist&task=tag&tag=Hilton+Arts+Festival&Itemid=131](http://vocfm.co.za/index.php?option=com_k2&view=itemlist&task=tag&tag=Hilton+Arts+Festival&Itemid=131)

The Media Review Network (MRN) and Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) have expressed their "deep disappointment" in the manner that the Hilton Arts Festival which got underway in Pietermaritzburg on Friday "betrayed the solidarity and integrity of international artists who stood up in support of the oppressed during the Apartheid years in South Africa and continue to stand in support of the boycott against Israel".

In a joint statement issued on Tuesday, the two bodies hailed these artists who they say "stood proudly in support of justice". "They were never intimidated nor did they surrender their principles and hide behind excuses such as 'freedom of expression' whilst human beings are suffering and dying. Their message then and now is that they will stand in solidarity with freedom by breaking all ties with nations guilty of the heinous crimes of racism, oppression and apartheid," the statement said.

"As South African's who have experienced apartheid, stood up against Apartheid, fought against its policies and many of us who have lost loved ones, we are appalled by the disconnect and insensitivity displayed by the Hilton Arts Festival. Clearly, their decision is based on their lack of recognition, appreciation and gratitude for the role, value and efforts made during apartheid by international artists. These artists sacrificed much for the liberation of the oppressed in our country," the lobby groups said.

"As South African's, while living through oppression, we took strength and valued the thunderous support from international artists. They used the stage to voice their disgust at the policies of our oppressive Apartheid governments' National Party. We therefore today, stand ashamed that not only has the Hilton Arts Festival not used the opportunity to raise awareness of the plight of the Palestinians, but they have colluded with an Apartheid State, through acceptance of sponsorships and the inclusion of Israeli artists."

According to the MJC and MRN, the Israeli Foreign Ministry's involvement in the Hilton Arts Festival can only be interpreted as an attempt to distract from Israel's abuse of human rights, contravention of international law and disregard for UN Resolutions. As the deputy director-general for Cultural Affairs, at Israel's Foreign Ministry, has said: "We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theatre companies, exhibitions and in this way show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war," the statement quoted.

"If, as the Chairman, Mr Mcmillan said that they do not condone Israeli actions then the next principled and logical step should have been to respect the call for a boycott. He should have distanced himself from the Israeli Embassy and removed Israeli plays from its programme entirely. This is what we, South Africans expected during the anti-apartheid struggle and this is what Palestinians expect of us now. This is our duty especially as South Africans who benefitted from boycotts and ultimately tasted liberation," the statement concluded. VOC  
[ENDS]

## **21 September**

### **1. Festival Criticism**

<http://www.iol.co.za/mercury/hilton-arts-festival-criticism-1.1141674>

CRITICISM of the Hilton Arts Festival for staging three Israeli plays at the weekend despite a pro-Palestinian boycott calling on people who had booked to cancel, continues.

A statement issued yesterday by the Media Review Network and Muslim Judicial Council expressed disappointment at the organisers.

"We are deeply disappointed that the Hilton Arts Festival betrayed the solidarity and integrity of international artists who stood up in support of the oppressed during the apartheid years in South Africa and continue to stand in support of the boycott against Israel.

"These artists stood proudly in support of justice. They were never intimidated nor did they surrender their principles and hide behind excuses such as freedom of expression while human beings are suffering and dying. Their message then and now is that they will stand in solidarity with freedom by breaking all ties with nations guilty of the heinous crimes of racism, oppression and apartheid," said Iqbal Jassat, chairman of the Media Review Network.

[ENDS]