

An open letter to Guilherme Botelho, choreographer and director of Alias-Cie

The people who saw you dance in Ramallah won't be able to admire you in Tel-Aviv : The Israeli army doesn't care the least about Palestinians who like your dance.

Geneva, August the 22th, 2011
Engl. version (Original : french)

Dear Guilherme Botelho,

We are dismayed to learn that you are planning to present your performance « *Sideways Rain* » in Israel. You are one of the most prestigious choreographers in Switzerland. Your performances abroad open the doors to international stages for other artists of this country. Thus by addressing this letter to you, we fully realize the importance of the event that you intend to participate in. We appeal to your political responsibility both as artist and as citizen, hoping to convince you, purely through the moral strength of these arguments, to make a strong gesture and reverse course.

In writing this letter to you, the BDS movement remembers that in 2008 you gave a performance of « *Approcher la Poussière* » in Ramallah. By doing so you offered a moment of joy to the Palestinian people who have been bruised by 60 years of oppression. Today, by going to dance in Tel-Aviv, you do the opposite. You are going to participate in a sort of fake symmetry between the oppressors and those who are oppressed: having honoured, by your presence, people who are fighting for their survival and their freedom, your new performance, in the same manner as any other prestigious visit, will be considered by the Israeli authorities as a form of artistic legitimization of its doings that violate human rights and humanitarian conventions.

For many years now, the State of Israel has shown that it does not worry about acting illegally in spite of official protests from all over the world. The right of return is denied to Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian population in Israel is subjected to important legal discriminations. The West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem East are still occupied. Colonies continue to grow in number and the Israeli army guarantees more rights to the settlers than to the autochthons. The Palestinian citizens of Jerusalem are regularly expelled from their homes. The Separation Wall advances in the West Bank in spite of all the legal opinions. The population of Gaza is still living under the blockade. And the Israeli Army harasses the activists who try to break this blockade even if it means going into foreign ports or on the high sea. Many jurists have recognized the characteristics of apartheid in this systematic policy of oppression. Given the helplessness of governments, the Palestinian civil society got together to launch an appeal for the boycott of the Israeli economy and the official institutions of the State of Israel. Citizens with consciences, including artists and intellectuals have been asked to exert peaceful pressure so that Israel is obliged to respect its international obligations.

Dear Guilherme Botelho, the city of Tel-Aviv, to where you will bring your dancers is only 60 kilometres from Ramallah. It is closer than the distance a spectator from Lausanne would travel in order to see one of your performances at the Théâtre Forum in Meyrin. And yet, those whom you met in Ramallah in 2008 will not be able to admire you in Tel-Aviv in 2011 because the Israeli army does not recognize the right to free movement for the Palestinians. The Israeli army couldn't care less that Palestinians like your dance performances. And in the opposite direction, we also know that peaceful activists who wish to go to the West Bank are also banished from Tel-Aviv. Only a few weeks ago, hundreds of such people were turned back at the airports in Geneva-Cointrin, Paris and Bruxelles just as they were to board their airplanes on the orders of the Israeli government. Isn't it embarrassing to be invited to perform a work of art, peaceful in essence, in a city that banishes peaceful activists?

Tel Aviv, as well as the Suzanne Dellal Centre, the prestigious stage where your dancers will perform, would like to be the showcase, white and clean of a State spattered with blood by its governments. However reality

is starker. In 1948 there were about 50,000 Arabs living in Tel-Aviv. Today there are only 4,000 left, living in one area of the city. The Suzanne Dellal Centre is two steps away from the Palestinian neighbourhood of Al-Manshiyya destroyed after 1948 in order to build skyscrapers and a public park. The majority of the Palestinian inhabitants of the city have been forced to leave their homes- most of them were obliged to go to live in Gaza (1). Whether in Tel Aviv or elsewhere, Israel has a policy of ethnic cleansing aiming at doing away with any human presence of Palestinians and eliminating any trace of their culture. Only a few days ago, a governmental committee was created in order to transcribe into Hebrew the names to those Arab cities, villages and neighbourhoods in Israel (2).

For all these reasons, dear Guilherme Botelho, we ask you to cancel your performance in Tel-Aviv for the coming month of October.

Following the example of many other artists throughout the world, including those from Switzerland, Nicolas Wadimoff, Daniel Künzi, Frédéric Choffat, Alain Bottarelli, Steff Bossert, Mat Callahan and Michel Bühler, who each in his own way has responded favourably to the call for boycott launched in 2004 and 2005 by Palestinian artists and the major stakeholders in the Palestinian civil society, we ask you to refuse to honour with your presence the events organized or sponsored by official Israeli authorities and to refuse to perform in theatres that serve as calling cards for the State of Israel. Rather, we ask you to follow the example of the essayist Naomi Klein, the musician Roger Water or the philosopher Slavoj Zizek, or others such as the Swiss artists of Eternal Tour, who in a creative fashion, by-passed the official channels and institutions of the State of Israel in order to allow aware alternative spectators, certainly a minority in Israel, to see their work. At the same time we encourage you to help Palestinian dancers and choreographers to benefit from your experience again.

Sincerely

Representing BDS Movement in Switzerland :

Birgit Althaler (translator, Basel) ; Gabriel Ash (Geneva) ; Anne Delahaye (dancer, Geneva) ; Marion Droz (Lausanne) ; Claudine Faehndrich (Neuchâtel) Mary Honderich (teacher, Geneva) ; Nicolas Leresche (dancer, Geneva) ; Rania Madi (UN Legal Advocacy Coordinator, Geneva) ; Jasmine Schmid (Biomedical Analysis Technician, Bassersdorf) ; Roberto Ventrella (designer, La Chaux-de-Fonds).

Notes

(1) *Manshiyya* ; a video by Raneen Jeries ; Zochrot : 2010. The Story of Two Refugees originating from the neighbourhood of Al-Manshiyya. http://wn.com/Al-manshiyya,_Jaffa

(2)« Gov't to transcribe al Quds to Yerushalayim ? *ynetnews.com* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*), July 3rd 2011.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4090372,00.html>

References :

Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel : <http://www.pacbi.org/>

Swiss Campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel : <http://www.bds-info.ch/fr/>

Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within : <http://boycottisrael.info/>

ATTENTION : BDS mouvement allows wide dissemination of this Open Letter