

Adalah-NY: The New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel

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Boycott the Arava Institute's "With Earth and Each Other: A Virtual Rally for a Better Middle East"

FACT SHEET
October 20, 2010



In July, 2010, over 1000 Israeli police entered the Palestinian Bedouin village of Al-Araqib in the Negev, and demolished the village to make room for a forest planted by the Jewish National Fund, a close partner of the Arava Institute. Al-Araqib has since been rebuilt and demolished four more times. The Arava Institute, located in the Negev, has not commented on the demolition of Al-Araqib. (Photo by ActiveStills¹)

"With Earth and Each Other: A Virtual Rally for a Better Middle East" is an online event that is scheduled for November 14th and is described as celebrating the efforts of the Arava Institute (www.withearhandeachother.org) in Israel. The Arava Institute's stated goals, like preparing "future Arab and Jewish leaders to cooperatively solve the region's environmental challenges," may initially appear laudable. However, the Arava Institute and "With Earth and Each Other" fail to take positions against Israeli oppression, and partner closely with the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a primary actor in dispossessing Palestinians from their land within Israel and within the occupied West Bank. Therefore, the Arava Institute and the event "With Earth and Each Other" are complicit in Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people and should be boycotted by artists, partners and sponsors.

More and more artists and institutions are taking a stand and [joining the boycott of Israel](#). Since Israel's war against Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009, [which left 1,400 Palestinians dead](#) and led the Goldstone Report to declare that [Israel had committed war crimes](#), many international artists have refused to conduct business as usual with a country that places itself above international standards. After Israel's shocking attack on a humanitarian aid ship bound for Gaza this past May, the number of artists has grown. [Elvis Costello](#), [Gil Scott Heron](#), [Carlos Santana](#), [Roger Waters](#), [Devendra Banhart](#), and the Pixies are but a few of the artists who have refused to perform in Israel in the past year.

Many problems with the November 14th virtual event were explained in a series of letters to celebrated folk artist and activist Pete Seeger calling on him to withdraw from the “With Earth and Each Other” virtual rally.² The reasons for the boycott of the event and of the Arava Institute were driven home once again through an [October 11 letter to the JNF](#) from 28 non-governmental institutions, human rights organizations and social movements in Israel, and eight American Jewish organizations calling for the "leadership of the JNF to end [its] complicity in the destruction of Bedouin villages in the Negev and in the dispossession of Israel’s Bedouin community." Once again, the Arava Institute chose not to speak out on an issue of vital importance to the Negev, failed to criticize its partner the JNF, and did not sign this letter from a broad coalition of groups.

Details on the reasons for the call to boycott the Arava Institute, “With Earth and Each Other,” and Arava’s partner the JNF follow below.

A) “With Earth and Each Other” violates the Palestinian boycott call, and whitewashes Israeli oppression

As part of the 2005 [Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions \(BDS\)](#), and inspired by the cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa, Palestinian people have asked international artists to join the BDS movement by [refusing to perform in Israel](#) or to participate in [events that serve to equate the occupier and the occupied](#) and thus promote the continuation of injustice. Participation in “With Earth and Each Other” undermines the call for BDS until Israel meets the basic requirements of human rights and international law by ending its occupation, ensuring equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and respecting the rights of Palestinian refugees.

“With Earth and Each Other” is described as a “peace” event, but peace without justice is not peace at all. The event will benefit the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies in the Negev, or Naqab, desert. But elsewhere in the Negev, [Palestinian Bedouin communities are being displaced daily](#). The Arava Institute said nothing this summer as the [unrecognized village of Al-Araqib was destroyed](#) – and re-built by residents – five times in order to make way for a Jewish National Fund (JNF) park. This destruction and blatant disregard of human communities in the name of the environment is nothing new.

[“With Earth and Each Other” claims](#) that the event’s “purpose is not to take a side [or] say who is right or wrong.” This implies that participation in the event is a neutral act, promoting “peace” while being devoid of any political message. However, as the late Howard Zinn famously said, you can’t be neutral on a moving train.

Some supporters of events like "With Earth and Each Other" explain that "neutral" "dialogue," which avoids taking sides, is vital to achieving peace. But the [Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel \(PACBI\)](#) has countered that idea:

Under conditions of colonial oppression, be it South Africa yesterday or Palestine today, joint projects claiming to be "apolitical" or aimed at promoting music, science, environmental protection, etc. as domains that are "above politics" are misleading and injurious to the struggle against injustice. By overlooking the oppressive reality of Israel's atrocities and gradual ethnic cleansing, these projects in effect legitimize and contribute to perpetuating and normalizing oppression.... in almost all cases, what may appear as “neutral” or “non-political” collaboration between Palestinians and Israelis is anything but. Presenting enmity between Palestinians/Arabs and Israelis as if it were primarily a result of lack of understanding of the “other side” or some other psycho-cultural factor unrelated to the reality of occupation and apartheid is a political stance *par excellence*....

More than twenty years of such projects in Palestine... have led to nothing but further entrenching Israel's colonization and progressive denial of Palestinian rights, while exonerating Israel on the international scene as a civilized entity trying to bridge gaps with the native Palestinians. This

important historical experience has taught the Palestinians, as it did South Africans, crucial lessons: false symmetry between the oppressor and oppressed only results in further empowering the oppressor, hence prolonging the bloodshed and injustice.

B) The Arava Institute's Close Relationship with the Jewish National Fund

In a number of recent statements about the event, the Arava Institute and its supporters have sought to downplay the extent of Arava's relationship to the JNF. However, [the Arava Institute website](#) explains that "The Arava Institute and the Jewish National Fund (JNF) share a common mission to protect and preserve the land of Israel. This common mission has resulted in a formal partnership between the two organizations, allowing JNF donors to direct their contributions to benefit the Arava Institute." Potential donors learn on another page of the [Arava Institute website](#) that donating through the JNF is one of the five ways to give to the Arava Institute. The Arava Institute is one of seven partners highlighted in [the JNF's Annual Report](#), and according to the [JNF's form 990 for 2008](#), the JNF granted \$357,315 to the Arava Institute in 2008. The JNF and Arava are clearly close partners, using one another to bolster their images and funding.

C) The Jewish National Fund's Central Role in Dispossessing Palestinians

Arava and its supporters have been seeking to minimize their relationship with the JNF because the JNF [has been engaged in the "Judaization" of Palestine](#) for more than 100 years. After the 1948 expulsion of two-thirds of the Palestinian people from their lands, the [JNF planted](#) fast-growing non-native trees on the ruins of Palestinian villages in a deliberate attempt to prevent refugees from returning to their land. The JNF continues to plant trees in Al-Araqib village and [throughout the Negev and the Galilee](#), working with the Israeli government to displace Palestinian people – who have Israeli citizenship but are not treated equally to Jewish citizens of the state – and steal their land on an ongoing basis. Today, [the JNF directly controls](#) 13% of the land in Israel and effectively controls more than 93% of the land, renting and leasing only to Jewish citizens of the state in violation of the rights of the Palestinian minority. Clearly, this is not an organization to partner with in a "peace" event.

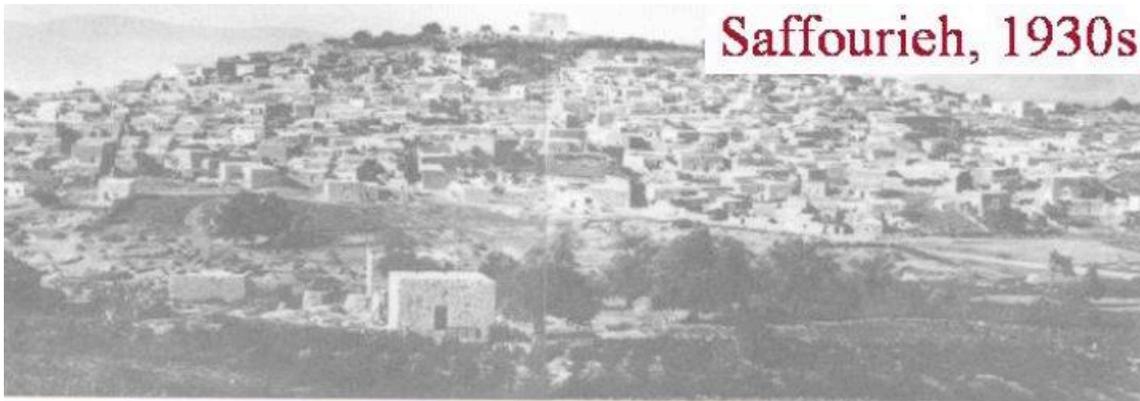
As seventeen Gazan groups explained [in their letter to Pete Seeger](#), in the period around 1948, the JNF "actively participated in the physical destruction of many of the erased 531 Palestinian villages, the ruins of which are still in the hearts and minds of the vast majority of the Gazan population, most of us registered refugees from these areas... Erasing our heritage and ties to the land continued thereafter. The Jewish National Fund's Canada Park, for example, was built over the ruins of the Palestinian villages Imwas, Yalu, and Beit Nuba, from whence the Israeli army forcibly removed the inhabitants and bulldozed the houses during the 1967 war."

More information on the JNF's role in dispossessing Palestinians has been documented by groups like Adalah: The Legal Center for Minority Rights in Israel, Human Rights Watch and American Jews for a Just Peace.³

D) The Jewish National Fund's Role in Seizure of Palestinian Land in the Occupied West Bank

According to [a 2005 report](#) in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz Daily*, an arm of the JNF has been buying land in the Israeli-occupied West Bank: "Since 1967, tens of thousands of dunams of land have been purchased by the Jewish National Fund in areas of strategic importance in Judea and Samaria. The lands share a common location: They are all near the Green Line, in areas which will be up for negotiation in the event of an Israel withdrawal to the 1949-1967 armistice lines. The lands were purchased with funds from the state and the World Zionist Organization, through Himnuta - a subsidiary established by the JNF to carry out complex and discreet transactions. According to its official policy, the JNF does not purchase

lands beyond the Green Line, one reason being to keep it out of political debates liable to have a negative effect on donations. However, since the 1967 Six-Day War, Himnuta has purchased land near the settlements near Jerusalem, including Beit Jala, Beit Safafa and the Etzion Bloc.”



The Palestinian village of Saffourieh in the 1930s and in 2006. The JNF planted trees over the remains of Saffourieh and hundreds of other demolished Palestinian villages circa 1948.⁴ Saffourieh is located near Nazareth in what is now Israel.

¹ <http://activestills.org/content/police-destroys-whole-negev-village-200-children-left-homeless-0#0>

² Letter from Jeff Halper, Coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, <http://icahdusa.org/2010/09/jeff-halper-pete-join-the-artists-who-are-boycotting-israel/>; Letter from over 40 organizations (including Adalah-NY), <http://adalahny.org/letters/letter-to-pete-seeger-from-over-40-orgs>; Letter from 17 groups in the Gaza Strip, <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1360>; Letter from Israelis from the group, BOYCOTT! Supporting the Palestinian BDS call from within <http://boycottisrael.info/content/boycotts-letter-pete-seeger>

³ <http://www.adalah.org/eng/jnf.php>; http://www.adalah.org/eng/pressreleases/pr.php?file=07_07_29; <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/03/30/map-0>; <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Nazareth/Saffuriyya/index.html>; http://phillyjpp.org/Philadelphia_Jews_for_a_Just_Peace/Projects_files/Trees_Curriculum_&_Teachers_Guide.pdf

⁴ <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/5504/conflicts-surface-from-the-ancient-ruins-at-moshav-tzipori/>; <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/JNF/Story1513.html>