

under-development of their institutions. More recently, the conditions of closure and siege have reduced our scientific endeavours to near-paralysis, leaving us unable to teach, let alone conduct research. I believe it would be more rational to work towards preserving Palestinian academic institutions against the Israeli army's onslaughts, and rebuilding them, before collaborating with Israeli academics.

To me, this seems the right moment to act, including endorsing boycotts, instead of turning to the easier yet ineffective paths of building personal relationships, scientific or otherwise. Boycotts have been effective in raising issues and influencing change.

Israeli and other academics need to stand up for the right of Palestinians to scientific and educational development, academic freedom and freedom of speech for all, not simply on one side of the border. Cooperation with individuals may make academics feel better, but is not helpful, and can possibly be harmful, in general terms. Saying no to academic boycotts may mean that academics are not willing to pay a price for their stated ideals. To many of us here, this translates as a *de facto* endorsement of the Israeli government's attempt to destroy 'anything Palestinian', including the academic institutions that these relationships are supposed to assist.

Rita Giacaman

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Did an academic boycott help to end apartheid?

Sir— The assertion made by Steven and Hilary Rose in Correspondence (*Nature* **417**, 221, 2002) that the boycott of South Africa by the world's academic communities "was instrumental in ending apartheid in South Africa" is a deception. Apartheid was actually terminated by two pivotal and interrelated political events.

First, the United States Congress, on 29 September 1986, overrode President Reagan's veto and imposed strict economic sanctions on South Africa. Second, F. W. de Klerk was elected president of South Africa on 14 September 1989. Two months later (16 November 1989), de Klerk announced the scrapping of the Separate Amenities Act, then, on 11 February 1990, freed Nelson Mandela from prison. The rest is historical detail.

So if the Roses, and the signatories of their petition, wish to bring Israel even further to its knees, they may need to persuade Europe and the United States to increase by an order of magnitude the stringency of the Arab-led international trade boycott of Israel that has been in place since 1948.

As it stands, the petitioners have not made a cogent argument for why they selected Israel alone — from the many

imperfect nations of the world — for their proposed academic boycott.

George Fink

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Violence versus freedom

Sir— I read with great interest your News story about academic cooperation during the recent violence here (*Nature* **417**, 209–210; 2002). Unfortunately, scientific work has become another victim of the violence. A related point is that of freedom of movement.

For many years, Palestinians could travel fairly freely in Israel. Thousands worked here on a daily basis. The increase in terrorist attacks, especially the suicide bombings, has made this freedom of movement unwise and dangerous. Many innocent people, including scientists, suffer as a result. Israelis are forbidden by the Israeli government to visit the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority, for their own safety. Israelis who visit Palestinian cities are likely to pay with their lives: hardly "freedom of movement".

I hope that we will manage to achieve a more rational, calm atmosphere in this part of the world — but I fear that it will take some time.

Joel Bigman

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In support of scientific exchange

The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (<http://www4.nas.edu/oia/oiahome.nsf/web/network>) was created to address grave issues of science and human rights throughout the world. It aims to put into practice the professional duty of scientists and scholars to assist those colleagues whose human rights have been — or are threatened to be — infringed, and to promote and protect the independence of academies and scholarly societies worldwide. The basis of the network's activities is the universal declaration of human rights.

The network seeks to promote the free exchange of ideas and opinions among scientists and scholars in all countries and, thereby, to stimulate the development of collaborative educational, research and human-rights endeavours within academies and the institutions with which they are affiliated.

Moratoria on scientific exchanges based on nationality, race, sex, language, religion, opinion and similar factors thwart the network's goals. They would

deny our colleagues their rights to freedom of opinion and expression; interfere with their ability to exercise their bona fide academic freedoms; inhibit the free circulation of scientists and scientific ideas; and impose unjust punishment. They would also be an impediment to the instrumental role played by scientists and scholars in the promotion of peace and human rights.

This statement, although that of a general principle with universal applicability, was prompted by a petition (see *Nature* **417**, 1 and 221–222; 2002) that advocates a moratorium on all grants and contracts to Israel from European cultural and research institutions. The moratorium being advocated, although surely well-intentioned, is misguided and inevitably counterproductive.

We all look forward to an equitable solution to the crisis in the Middle East, with lasting peace and stability for both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. But the strongest impact of a moratorium would, rather than influencing Israeli policy-makers, seriously and unfairly

harm our scientific colleagues in Israel — many of whom have actively promoted peace through collegial engagement and open communication among academic centres in the region.

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This statement was issued on 28 April 2002 by the members of the executive committee of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies. It was sent privately to some 60 national academies affiliated with the network. In response to a request by *Nature*, the committee (whose members' institutions are listed for identification purposes only) has agreed to its publication — Editor, Correspondence.