Isaac denies Noam Chomsky entry to West Bank
An open letter to the Academic Community

Noam Chomsky was recently due to deliver two lectures at the Palestinian university of Bir Zeit, which lies at the gates of Ramallah: "America and the world" and "America at home".

On the 16th of May the renowned professor of Linguistics at MIT Boston, was seeking to cross the border between Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, but after hours of questioning by border officials, Chomsky’s passport was stamped with "Denied Entry" and he was sent away. Speaking to journalists about his lengthy interrogation at the border, Chomsky referred to what he was told by border guards: "Israel does not like what you say."

Israel’s Ministry of the Interior insisted the incident was a "misunderstanding" and its spokeswoman said they were to try to clear the matter up. In truth there is not much to "clear up" with regard to Israel’s attitude. Despite the excuses given following the "incident" there is really no place for misunderstanding, as Chomsky himself declared in an interview to Al Jazeera.

The true reason why the eminent scholar was banned is that he has frequently spoken out against Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories. The denial of entry to the West Bank to the man defined by the New York Times as "the most important intellectual alive" and by The Nation as an "inexhaustible source of knowledge" shows us clearly what is happening in Israel. If Chomsky was "only" the linguist who had given the most important contribution to 20th century theoretical linguistics, we probably would not be talking about all this.

But the fact is, since the years of protest against the Vietnam war, he has always presented himself as an all-round intellectual; an intellectual who has crossed the boundaries of the topic of his studies and made political and social engagement a substantial part of his life. His analysis of the role of the mass media in Western democracies and of US foreign policy is one of his most famous works.

Chomsky’s banishment is only the latest episode in a long series of attacks against the academic and information world and their right to express criticism. It is not the first time that the so called "only democracy in the Middle East" has attempted to block the free circulation of ideas, even when they are expressed by very influential voices. Only two years ago another important scholar, Norman Finkelstein, an American professor of History, was barred from entering Israel for ten years. Israel did not like his book, "The Holocaust Industry", that explores the exploitation of Jews during World War II for the interests of the state of Israel. Ilan Pappe, on the other hand, has been forced to seek exile in the United Kingdom because of the heavy pressure and censorship that the Government has placed on his studies, especially since he started writing about the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

Despite all these prohibitions imposed by Tel Aviv, the state of Israel consistently endeavours to show itself as a champion of culture and actively combats international campaigns for academic and cultural boycotting, which is guilty of damaging culture all over the world. Chomsky's fate would appear to confirm what Gideon Levy wrote a few days ago on the pages of Haaretz: "Israel itself is one of the world’s prolific boycotters. [...] Israel has imposed a cultural, academic, political, economic and military boycott on the territories." Everyday in Israel, freedom of thought, freedom to express dissent, the right to study for the Palestinian people are crushed and trampled on with impunity.

What moves us students to apply to the Academic Community is the necessity to come together and speak out, make ourselves heard. We believe it is our duty, as players in the world of universities and culture, to report the continuous attacks perpetrated by the state of Israel against the basic rights on which a democracy is established. Does "critical thinking" still mean something in Israel? From this perspective Chomsky’s case is paradigmatic. To stay silent in this situation is to be a part of it.

to sign the petition, please write to israelcontrolacultura@gmail.com

subscribers here: http://cau.noblogs.org/post/2010/05/16/lettera-divieto-ingresso-palestina-chomsky
and here: http://snipurl.com/wqnez

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2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0vvaNM9J0U&feature=player_embedded#