

Call for IGLYO Member Organizations: Vote NO to IGLYO in Israel

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IGLYO is the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organization.

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Dear IGLYO Member Organizations and Board of Directors,

During the past week, we’ve had the pleasure of publicly discussing, with activists and organizations around the world, issues that shape the daily lives of Palestinians, straight and queer, living under Israeli occupation.

As we write this letter, we cannot help but reflect on the historical significance of holding such widespread conversations with groups and organizations across the world. The international LGBT agenda has too often disconnected the struggle for LGBT equality and justice from issues of structural racism and privilege. The location of IGLYO’s General Assembly is that long-awaited tipping point where we, as queer activists, can no longer ignore or bypass politics of structural racism and occupation which, in reality, cannot be disentangled from matters of sexuality and gender.

Below, we have attempted to respond to the comments, suggestions and concerns that were brought to the table. We hope that this comprehensive explanation will help convince Member Organizations to support our call and further emphasize why it is crucial that IGLYO move their General Assembly conference out of Israel. We urge Member Organizations to vote ‘NO’ on IGLYO’s new survey “Do you agree with the Board’s decision regarding the hosting of this year’s General Assembly?”

I. What is the “IGLYO out of Israel” Campaign about?

“IGLYO out of Israel” is a campaign led by the three Palestinian Queer organizations: alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society; Aswat Palestinian Gay Women and Palestinian Queers for BDS. It is a campaign devoted to convince IGLYO to relocate its 2011 General Assembly from Tel Aviv, Israel.

This campaign aims to recruit international solidarity from LGBTQ communities everywhere to endorse the objectives of reaching a global historically-informed understanding of Palestine/Israel; for every queer, academic, artist, and activist to hold Israel accountable for its crimes and to support the Palestinians' struggle in ending 63 years of occupation. "IGLYO out of Israel" is a campaign that strives to urge IGLYO's Member Organizations to refuse to take an active role in sustaining occupation by voting against holding the General Assembly in Tel Aviv, Israel.

"IGLYO out of Israel" is not an attempt to attack IGLYO or to arm wrestle with IGY - this campaign comes from our deep faith that LGBTQ individuals, as well as international organizations, have to engage in the struggle against racism, apartheid, and occupation. Our campaign is simply stating that by not relocating the 2011 GA, IGLYO, along with its member organizations, will explicitly become a pawn in the hands of the system that oppresses us.

The campaign has been gaining wide support from queer individuals, international groups, feminist organizations and even some of IGLYO's Member Organizations. So far IGLYO has received some 380 emails from queers all around the world, as well as letters from 3 Member Organizations (Read MOs KAOS GL, NUS LGBT and Pink Life statements, and the statement of an associate member Helem) supporting our call and asking IGLYO to relocate their GA.

II. What Now?

Due to the pressure this campaign has caused and the public debate that ensued, IGLYO has decided to put this to a vote within its member organizations with the question: "Do you agree with the Board's decision regarding the hosting of this year's General Assembly?". Read more about this here: "Statement from the Board of IGLYO"

Though we see their decision to open up a vote without engagement or deep debate as less than ideal, we would like to commend IGLYO for their decision to take this issue back to the MOs and realize that this is not a decision that the board can make on its own. Nevertheless, we will present brief responses to the concerns raised by IGLYO, and provide our reasoning for why MOs must take a stand and vote NO.

To briefly address IGLYO's frustration with the exchanges they have had with us Queer Palestinian groups: we have in fact had a few email exchanges with IGLYO, where we expressed our concerns. IGLYO politely dismissed our concerns and instead reiterated that they are working with IGY, and not the Israeli government. IGLYO's refusal to see our request as legitimate was a disappointment. The numerous facts we put on the table went unanswered and unaddressed: Namely, that IGY receives Israeli government money, that IGY works closely with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and that Israel's apartheid policies could affect IGLYO delegates and their ability to attend the GA. Even more so, with Israel's structural racism and apartheid policies, holding the GA in Tel Aviv remains problematic in itself, and is the least neutral act that any international organization could adopt.

The correspondences with IGLYO made it clear that our demands were not taken seriously and that there was no constructive dialogue to be had "behind closed doors" which drove us to present this initiative publicly. By emphasizing, in their statement, their complaints about the nature of our correspondence and our refusal to have our concerns swept aside under the guise of needing "further information," the IGLYO board is attempting to take the focus away from the content and truth of our demands. We will not be derailed, and we ask IGLYO MOs to not dismiss the important questions we are bringing to their attention.

III. Why Vote NO

No to Neutrality:

IGLYO's board claims that by not taking a stand on this they are being neutral. Unfortunately, in such situations, neutrality is complicity, if not direct support. We must remind IGLYO that "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." – Desmond Tutu.

Claims of Neutrality when Israel has been constantly violating international law, violating Human Rights, in its 63 years long occupation of the Palestinian people during which it implemented apartheid policies and racial segregation against Palestinians, are totally unjustified, and a clear stand on the side of the oppressor. We firmly believe both MOs and the board must take a strong stand from these Israeli practices.

No to Pinkwashing:

By Holding the GA in Tel Aviv, and by accepting money from the Israeli government, IGLYO is violating the guidelines of the boycott call that the Palestinian civil society issued in 2005, and the call issued by Palestinian Queers for BDS in 2010, and is thus playing a crucial role in Israel's attempts to Pinkwash its crimes and re-brand itself.

Regardless of IGLYO's reasons and philosophy behind holding its 2011 GA in Tel Aviv, accepting Israeli government money, directly or indirectly through IGY, makes IGLYO complicit in and part of whitewashing Israel's crimes and maintaining business-as-usual with an apartheid state, its ongoing occupation of the Palestinian people, and its daily human rights violations by broadcasting an image of normality and abusing the relatively progressive "Gay Rights" record in Israel.

Pinkwashing initiatives have traditionally branded Israel as the only 'gay-friendly' country in the Middle East, while presenting Palestinian society as rooted in homophobia and backwards, an image we wholeheartedly reject. Read more about pinkwashing [here](#).

No to Complicity with the Occupation

One of our main concerns behind the "Take IGLYO out of Israel" campaign is the fact that the Israeli Member Organization, IGY, has multi-layered links with the state of Israel. IGY is not only complicit in and supports Israeli policies, but it also plays an active role in maintaining the Israeli occupation by working closely with the IDF, the same military institution that kills Palestinians with daily cold blooded manner. Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, their illegal occupation of Palestine, the denial to the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and daily discrimination against Palestinian citizens in Israel (queers and non-queers alike) all constitute processes that IGY is involved in, directly or indirectly. While IGY is a member of IGLYO, and thus part of the wider IGLYO community, we cannot accept IGLYO's decision to turn a blind eye to IGY's clear cut complicity with the Israeli occupation and apartheid policies.

In their last email to us, IGLYO claimed that it was "IGY's intention to invite representatives from alQaws, Aswat & PQ for BDS to participate in the Leadership Conference that will occur in advance of the GA." IGY's invitation to the Palestinian Queer groups is deplorable given IGY's affiliations, funding sources, history, and political stances. IGY's intention to invite us to sit down for a 'dialogue' is certainly not relevant and does not answer our call. Instead, it tactically attempts to promote IGY to be inclusive, while actually they take a very clear position on the Israeli occupation. It also

appears to be an incredibly cynical response, given that IGY is well aware that any Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza are prevented from entering Israel. This, along with all the reasons listed above, make IGY a boycottable organization that Palestinian Queers have no intention to work or be involved with.

The hosting of the GA 2011 in Tel Aviv will drag IGLYO and its MOs and associated members into being complicit with IGY's protocols and actions. IGY claim that they "see this summit as an opportunity to strengthen the connection between two geographically-adjacent, yet politically-far LGBTQ communities - the Palestinian and Israeli communities. They find the connections that will be made during this summit will be of greater importance than any peace summit held by politicians".

We believe this argument to be naive and misleading. IGY's portrayal of the Palestinian struggle as a misunderstanding between two equals that can be solved through dialogue ignores the historical fact of the 63 year old occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people by one of the most racist states in the present world. Israel is a state that ethnically cleansed Palestine in 1948 and refuses to heed to UN resolutions that grant the displaced refugees their right of return; a state that puts 1.5 million Palestinians in essentially the largest open air prison in the Gaza Strip; a state that is putting over 5 million Palestinians under military occupation in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem; a state that systemically discriminates against Palestinian citizens of Israel. Given this reality, what dialogue is IGY inviting us to, while they keep endorsing the war machinery that sustains this oppressing illegal occupation?

Marching in the annual Human Rights Parade in Tel Aviv, the one IGLYO intends to attend, and calling to end the occupation of Palestine will have no significant effect compared to the advertising and re-branding services that IGLYO will be providing to the Israeli state by holding their conference in Tel Aviv. And thus participating in a demonstration calling for the end of occupation in this context is deceptive, crude, and counter-productive. The occupation will not end unless the world start taking serious responsibility, and Israel start seeing the results of its ongoing occupation. We truly hope that the Member Organizations and the IGLYO board will take responsibility and collectively decide to move the GA out of Israel, and support the Palestinian inalienable right to justice and freedom.

Thank you,

alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society

Aswat - Palestinian Gay Women

Palestinian Queers for BDS

P.S.

* <http://www.pqbds.com/archives/186>