

# JCRC and the Attack on Palestinian Solidarity in the Bay Area

In 2009 the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) went after Eastside Arts Alliance and Eastside refused to back down. Today, the JCRC is attacking the Arab Resource and Organizing Center after they won Arabic language access in San Francisco schools.

(This information is drawn from a case study in *The Business of Backlash: The Attack on the Palestinian Movement and Other Movements for Justice*. The full report is available for download at: [www.ijan.org/resources/business-of-backlash](http://www.ijan.org/resources/business-of-backlash))

**Over the years, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of San Francisco has attacked numerous people of color-led organizations fighting for social justice that have taken a stand in support of Palestinian rights.**

Today, JCRC is targeting the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) in an attempt to strike them from a resolution with the San Francisco Unified School District that creates greater language access for Arab and Vietnamese families. AROC works for both the empowerment and dignity of marginalized Arab communities and also with individuals and organizations from a wide range of communities impacted by racism and injustice. The program must include AROC as a partner not only because of their longstanding work on language access in the city of SF, and the fact that they are the only organization providing legal services in Arabic in Northern California, and organizing and mobilizing the Arab community, but also because this is just one illustration of their leadership in cross-community collaboration in service of racial justice.

JCRC's outrageously false depiction of AROC as a "hate group" is part of a long history of attacking community organizations including: San Francisco Women Against Rape, the Middle East Children's Alliance, Oakland Museum of Children's Art, and the efforts to bring Ethnic Studies programs into local schools. JCRC is willing to undermine community access to services if organizations do not fall in line with JCRC's uncritical support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine. One common tactic of the JCRC is economic coercion—threatening the funding of organizations by reaching out to their funders and claiming that the organization is practicing antisemitism. One prominent example of this kind of attack was leveled against Eastside Arts Alliance from January through May of 2009.

## **Summary:**

Following the January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 murder of Oscar Grant by BART (transit) police in Oakland, California and during Israel's brutal 2008/2009 attack the people of Gaza, Eastside Arts Alliance and the Gaza Action Committee (an activist collective responding to attacks on Gaza) organized an event on state-sponsored violence from Gaza to Oakland. Terrified of the connections being made, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and Anti-Defamation League (ADL) sent representatives to document the event. Following the event,

the ADL and JCRC representatives both published articles denouncing the event as antisemitic.

Both organizations then approached the Haas Foundation, a pro-Israel foundation, to request that the foundation use its influence as a funder of Eastside Arts Alliance to pressure the organization to issue an apology for the event and a poster that they considered particularly antisemitic and meet with JCRC to discuss the disagreement and collaborate with them on a public event. Eastside agreed to take down and write a brief apology for

the image that a young person created and they felt was inaccurate and inappropriate but declined to apologize for the event that reflects their guiding political principles and program work. They also declined to meet or collaborate with an organization that they political oppose and who is attempting to coerce them to abandon their political principles in order to maintain funding.

After being asked by the Haas Foundation to do so, Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA) reached out to Eastside Arts Alliance and offered to play a mediation role. PJA participated in economic coercion by pushing for Eastside to apologize rather than insisting that JCRC not use economic coercion and that Haas not make the funding of a community-based organization contingent on their support of Israel. As an organization committed to the ability of Third World people in the United States and internationally to live without exploitation, forced displacement and according to their own ways of life and values, such a request goes against the very foundation of Eastside Arts Alliance.

Moreover, PJA kept insisting that Eastside Arts Alliance needed sensitivity training to understand the nerve that they had hit by drawing parallels between the State violence against Palestinians and that of Black Americans. It did not occur to PJA that the Director of Eastside was, in fact, a Jewish Black woman. The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network supported Eastside in the process of having to navigate the reactionary and liberal Zionist pressure they were experiencing and organized letters of support from Jewish community members who did not share the reaction that PJA, JCRC and Haas insisted was uniform in the Jewish community of the Bay Area.

*Note:* The ADL complaint claimed that the following statements were false: “Palestinians have curfews just like youth in Oakland; Oakland police are trained by Israeli law enforcement to oppress minorities; during Hurricane Katrina, the Israeli Mossad shot black Americans trying to survive the devastation; the gentrification of Oakland is the same as “the Occupation”; the same company which built the security barrier in Israel is building the barrier between the U.S. and Mexico; and so on.” The only unproven statement in the list above

is that Mossad shot Black Americans trying to survive Katrina. However, the military did travel to New Orleans to train the National Guard in population control during and following Katrina.

**Outcome:** Ultimately, Haas stopped funding Eastside and another funder implied that they were not going to fund because of their concern over the issue of support for Israel. However, Eastside Arts Alliance has continued to operate and maintains its program and political principles, including solidarity with all struggles against racism and colonization. Sister organizations offered to support Eastside in identifying other funding sources.

**Implications:** Eastside Arts Alliance provided an example of staying to one’s principles despite the pressure of funding/defunding. They were willing to lose some financial support rather than compromise on their principles, political goals, solidarity with others who they shared a struggle with and their programming. At the same time, they were willing to admit to problematic art being displayed without then agreeing with the overall criticism of the parallels they felt were valid between the violence in Gaza and the violence experienced by Oakland’s Black and Brown communities. The support of sister organizations around funding/defunding, and of Jewish community members and IJAN against the false accusations of antisemitism and insensitivity were useful in supporting Eastside’s decision to stand on its principles. IJAN was able to accompany Eastside to its meeting with PJA, standing with the Director against the assumptions and false representation of a singular “Bay Area” Jewish community or perspective.

Ultimately, this case raises the importance of the Palestine solidarity movement’s commitment to supporting organizations facing economic coercion by supporting their ability to continue to do the work. This might mean making introductions to foundations that are supportive, supporting them with a drive to make up the difference for the short-term, hosting fundraisers or other ways to support the organization with pro-bono or volunteer labor or resources.

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