

UNESCO Human Rights Conference Honoring Israel's President Shimon Peres. Four of Five Speakers Pull Out

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A “human rights” conference at the University of Connecticut was in disarray after almost all the speakers pulled out. The [Hartford Courant](#) reports today:

Four of the five speakers scheduled to address a conference on human rights scheduled for [today] Tuesday at the University of Connecticut canceled Monday, with one of those speakers saying she would not come because the event was honoring Israeli President Shimon Peres.

The Electronic Intifada was the first to report on Sunday that Bahrain rights defender Maryam Al-Khawaja [had withdrawn from the UNESCO-sponsored conference](#) that was due to honor her father, political prisoner [Abdulahdi Al-Khawaja](#), because the same event is honoring [Peres](#).

“Whilst I am honored that you chose my father, I am also utterly disappointed that you would honor him alongside a person who has been responsible for many human rights violations and should be put on trial, not honored,” Al-Khawaja wrote in an open letter.

The [Hartford Courant](#) adds:

It was not immediately clear why the other speakers canceled, but Stephanie Reitz, spokesman for the university said “It’s disappointing. I’m sure they all had a lot of interesting things to share.”

But she said the event would go forward Tuesday with some modification. She said the only speaker scheduled is Peres’ son-in-law and personal physician, Raphael Walden, a vascular surgeon who was chief of surgery at Sheba and has been a visiting professor at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

The other speakers at the 13th Annual UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights Conference at the University of Connecticut on 23 October, titled “[Legacies Of Human Rights Leadership And Struggles](#)” were due to be grassroots civil rights activist Yuri Kochiyama, Samia Nkrumah, daughter of Ghana independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, and Shehrbano Taseer, daughter of Salmaan Taseer, the governor of Pakistan’s Punjab province who was assassinated in January 2011.

Last night, opponents of the honor to Peres held an alternative event titled “What Legacy of Human Rights Leadership? The Truth About Shimon Peres and Israel/Palestine,” featuring Lenni Brenner, Stanley Heller, and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui.

Stanley Heller, executive director of the Middle East Crisis Committee, told the Courant, “The UNESCO conference is a great idea to honor people who have fought for human rights, but they are making a huge mistake with Shimon Peres.”

Kauanui, a Wesleyan University professor who serves on the [Advisory Board](#) of the [US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#) (USACBI) said in an email to the Courant, “Peres and the State of Israel are responsible for the violent domination of the Palestinian people through colonialism, occupation, and apartheid. These three prongs of brutal oppression are not only illegal, each is the very antithesis of human rights, democracy and freedom.”

On Monday, [PACBI](#), the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, publicly [thanked Al-Khawaja for her stance](#). “From Palestine to Bahrain, we stand with you, firm in the knowledge that only together, supporting each other’s struggles, can we free ourselves,” the statement said.

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