



Palestinian Queers
for BDS

SAY NO TO **PINKWASHING** AT THE USSF!

We, the undersigned queer Arab organizations, are appalled by the US Social Forum's decision to allow *Stand with Us* to utilize the event as a platform to pinkwash Israel's crimes in the region. *Stand with Us* is cynically manipulating the struggle of queer people in the Middle East through its workshop entitled "LGBTQI Liberation in the Middle East" (<http://bit.ly/c3MLLA>).

Stand with Us is a self-declared Zionist propaganda organization which describes itself as "an international education organization that ensures that Israel's side of the story is told in communities, campuses, libraries, the media and churches through brochures, speakers, conferences, missions to Israel, and thousands of pages of Internet resources" (<http://bit.ly/b9eAc4>).

Stand with Us has no connection with the LGBT movement in the Middle East apart from ties to Zionist Israeli LGBT organizations, yet it claims to speak for and about our movements. It has no credibility in our region, and as organizations working in and from the Middle East, we condemn its attempt to use us, our struggles, our lives, and our experiences as a platform for pro-Israeli propaganda.

Since Israel's brutal wars on Gaza and Lebanon in 2006 and particularly after the recent unprovoked attack on the flotilla of activists going to Gaza, the Israeli government has found itself increasingly marginalized by international condemnations and weakened through the growing success of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. To remedy this, it has launched a massive PR campaign using organizations such as *Stand with Us* to convince the world that Israel is not a brutal settler-colony state, but rather a free democracy where human rights in general, and LGBT rights in particular, are respected and upheld. *Stand With Us* deceptively uses the language of LGBT and women's rights to obscure the fact that institutionalized discrimination is enshrined within the state of Israel.

Our struggle is deeply intertwined with the struggle of all oppressed people, and we cannot accept that we are being used as a tool to discredit the Palestinian cause. *Stand with Us* would have everyone believe that the Palestinian cause is an unworthy one because of the homophobia that exists within Palestinian society, as if homophobia does not exist elsewhere, and as if struggles for justice are predicated on some sort of inherent "goodness" of the oppressed, rather than on the principles of freedom, justice, and equality for everyone,

everywhere. *Stand with Us* would have us all compartmentalize our beliefs, lives, and identities so that solidarity with the queer struggle would preclude solidarity with others.

While *Stand With Us* is quick to point out the oppression of queer Palestinians under the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, it conveniently forgets that those same queers are not immune to the bombs, blockades, apartheid and destruction wrought upon them daily by the Israeli government, and that Israel's multi-tiered oppression hardly makes a distinction between straight and gay Palestinians.

We refuse to be instrumentalized by anyone, be it our own oppressive governments or the Zionist lobby hijacking our struggle to legitimize the state of Israel and its policies, thus providing even more fodder for our own governments to use against us. If you want to learn about our movements and struggles, engage with us, rather than with those who will use us as pawns in Israel's campaign to pinkwash its crimes.

The inclusion of *Stand With Us* at the USSF is an egregious oversight on the part of the forum. We ask the forum to justify this inclusion given that it violates its own principles of anti-racism, uniting oppressed communities, prioritizing marginalized voices, and opposing US foreign policy. The USSF should be held accountable to its own standards. We look forward to hearing its plans to address the situation.



Helem

Lebanese Protection for LGBT

www.helem.net



Al-Qaws

For Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society

www.alqaws.org



ASWAT

Palestinian Gay Women

www.aswatgroup.org

Palestinian Queers for BDS

pqbds.wordpress.com