

COLLABORATIONS WITH ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN ORGANISATIONS: UPDATE

The war between Hamas and Israel continues, as do the grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, which are unfortunately so characteristic of this conflict and which Ghent University already condemned in its statement of 23 November 2023. Meanwhile, it is also becoming clear that the war is leading to the large-scale destruction in Gaza of educational and research institutions, libraries, publishing houses and cultural centres¹. Ghent University condemns this destruction of educational institutions and cultural infrastructure and the huge impact the war is having on the right to education.

The Ghent University human rights policy implies, among other things, that institutional agreements cannot and will not be signed with Israeli or Palestinian organisations involved in serious human rights violations or violations of international humanitarian law. This means that collaborations are refused with Israeli organisations operating commercially in occupied territories, or with research groups developing defence or security technology that can be used for the occupation of Palestinian territories and the building of new settlements.

In late November 2023, Ghent University announced that in the coming weeks and months, the university would review for each organisation with which an institutional cooperation is ongoing or planned, what moral, financial or material support to Israeli or Palestinian warring parties consists of, and contact these organisations to ascertain whether, and to what extent, they are involved in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. If this is the case, steps would be taken to stop the cooperation and no future collaborations will be initiated until new elements lead to a re-evaluation.

Meanwhile, it has become clear that Ghent University has no institutional bilateral collaborations with universities in Israel. However, Ghent University does have 2 bilateral agreements with Palestinian universities. Those agreements with Palestinian universities will remain in place.

Ghent University does partner in a number of multilateral European projects in which universities and research institutions in Israel are also partners. More specifically, these are Erasmus Mundus or Horizon research projects.

The assessment reveals that some research institutions provide material support to the warring parties or are involved in the occupation of Palestinian territory which violates international law². The Committee also receives reports that research institutions are temporarily suspending students and academics, asking them to resign or imposing disciplinary sanctions for calling for a ceasefire or expressing solidarity with civilians affected by the conflict³. These may be violations of the right to

¹ Saif, A. A. (6 December 2023). *The second preliminary report on the cultural sector damage. War on the Gaza Strip October 7th – December 6th 2023*. Middle East Studies Association (21 November 2023). *Letter Demanding an end to Israel's military assault on Gaza's educational sector*, <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2023/11/21/letter-demanding-an-end-to-israels-military-assault-on-gazas-educational-sector>.

² See, among others, the reports on United Nations Human Rights Council, *The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-israel/index>.

freedom of expression and academic freedom. On the other hand, a university should be able to act when its staff or students incite hatred or intolerance.

For several research institutions, it is unclear for the time being whether they are involved in serious violations of freedom of expression or academic freedom, or provide material support to the war. The Committee decided to contact relevant institutions. Until a response is forthcoming or new elements lead to a reassessment, no new institutional agreements will be signed with these research institutions either.

Regarding the collaboration in European multilateral research projects, changing the composition of those European consortia is a decision Ghent University cannot take autonomously. A decision on the possible exit from those joint European research projects is therefore not currently on the table for Ghent University.

Researchers wishing to enter into cooperation with Israeli or Palestinian organisations must submit the cooperation to the [Committee on Human Rights Policy and Dual-Use Research](#) so the Committee can issue an advise on the cooperation. The Committee meets on a monthly basis.

³ Middle East Studies Association (28 November 2023). *Letter regarding intensified targeting of Palestinian students in Israeli universities*, <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2023/11/28/letter-regarding-intensified-targeting-of-palestinian-students-in-israeli-universities>. Scholars at Risk (29 Octobre 2023). *Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2023-10-29-hebrew-university-of-jerusalem>. Times Higher Education (31 Octobre 2023). *Palestinian students suspended by Israeli universities*, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/palestinian-students-suspended-israeli-universities>. Scholars at Risk (10 October 2023). *University of Haifa*, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2023-10-10-university-of-haifa>.