



UNIVERSITEIT  
GENT

**CLARIFICATION ON**  
**COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN**  
**GHENT UNIVERSITY AND**  
**ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN**  
**UNIVERSITIES**

23 NOVEMBER 2023

The *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (OCHA) reports that since Hamas' attack on Israel on 7 October, more than 1.200 Israelis and 11.000 Palestinians have died, including respectively more than 29 and 4.500 children. More than 5.400 Israelis and 27.000 Palestinians sustained injuries. More than 150 Israelis are held hostage by Hamas, more than 41.000 homes in Gaza were destroyed and 1.6 million people are fleeing Gaza.<sup>1</sup> Teaching and research activities at Israeli and Palestinian partner universities were forcibly suspended. The Ghent University community is concerned and deeply touched by the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives in recent weeks and expresses its solidarity with Israeli and Palestinian colleagues and students affected by the events. Attacks targeting civilians cannot be justified.

Hostilities in Gaza and Israel continue. Hamas' actions, with killings, hostage-taking, deliberate attacks on civilians and indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel are war crimes. Israeli airstrikes on Gaza and the blocking of fuel, water, electricity and food in Gaza lead to the collective punishment of the people of Gaza for Hamas' crimes. The Israeli occupation of Palestine, including the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, is accompanied by violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.<sup>2</sup>

Some companies, academic institutions and researchers may be directly or indirectly involved in these violations of international humanitarian law or human rights. This is the case, for example, when they develop or produce technology that is later used to commit human rights violations or violations of international humanitarian law, because they establish or operate in areas under military occupation.

Given the importance of human rights and the observation that the current war involves grave violations of international humanitarian law, including disproportionate damage to civilians and infrastructure, we also urge our governments to work toward a cease-fire.

The university community is a socially engaged community. It is also for this reason that Ghent University adopted a human rights policy in 2017. With this, the university aims to prevent human rights violations during our activities, to prevent our research results from later being misused for human rights violations, and to cooperate with partners involved in serious or systematic human rights violations.

The Ghent University human rights policy means, among other things, that no institutional agreements have been or will be signed with Israeli or Palestinian organizations involved in serious human rights violations or violations of international humanitarian law. In the past, for example, collaborations were refused with Israeli organizations operating commercially in occupied territories, or with research groups developing defense or security technology that can be used for the occupation of Palestinian territories and the building of new settlements. Even in the future, such collaborations are not consistent with the Ghent University human rights policy.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Reported impact since 7 October 2023*, <https://www.ochaopt.org>. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #45*, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-45>. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #19*, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-19>. Data until 10 November 2023.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Crisis Context and Impact*, <https://www.ochaopt.org/country/opt>.

On the other hand, Ghent University has many collaborations ongoing with Israeli and Palestinian organizations. Those collaborations include universities that supported the warring parties<sup>3</sup> after 7 October or possibly provide material or financial support. This could mean that these partner organizations are indirectly involved in human rights violations. At the same time, certain Israeli and Palestinian universities are also making it clear that they are concerned about the impact of the war on human rights.<sup>4</sup>

In the coming weeks and months, Ghent University will thoroughly investigate for each organization with which institutional cooperation is ongoing or planned, what moral, financial or material support to the Israeli or Palestinian warring parties consists of, and contact these organizations to ascertain whether, and to what extent, they are involved in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. If they are, steps will be taken to discontinue the cooperation and no future collaborations will be initiated until new elements lead to a re-evaluation.

To rule out the possibility that Ghent University, by collaborating with organizations in Israel or Palestine, is contributing to human rights violations, researchers are asked to contact the Human Rights Policy and Dual Use Research Committee for any new institutional collaboration with Israeli or Palestinian research institutions, companies, or other organizations.

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<sup>3</sup> Israel Association of University Heads, *Letter from 1 November 2023*, <https://vera.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/VERA-%E2%80%93-To-our-Colleagues-%E2%80%93-1.11.2023.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Tel Aviv University, *45 Days into the War — An Update from the TAU President*, <https://english.tau.ac.il/news/Prof-Ariel-Porat-20-11-23>.

