



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc

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25 January 2024

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu  
pmoh@pmo.gov.il

Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant  
pniot@mod.gov.il

Minister of Education Yoav Kisch  
sar@edu.gov.il

Minister of Justice Yariv Levin  
sar@justice.gov.il

Major General Ghasan Alyan  
Head of Civil Administration in the West Bank, Coordination of  
Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)  
m.pnz@cogat.gov.il

Prime Minister, Ministers, Major General:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to vehemently condemn the ongoing brutal military campaign against the Palestinians of Gaza and demand its immediate cessation. The death toll since 7 October 2023 of Gazan Palestinians has reached a devastating 25,000, with at least 62,000 wounded as a result of Israeli attacks. In this letter, as in our previous one ([21 November 2023](#)), we focus on the decimation of the education sector in the Gaza Strip through the Israeli military's killing of students, faculty, and staff and its targeted destruction of schools and university buildings, including laboratories, libraries and classrooms.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Over the past 15 weeks, the unprecedented level and extent of death and destruction wrought by Israel's war on Gaza has devastated the educational sector. According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), more than 625,000 students—90,000 of whom are university students—and close to 23,000 teachers have been impacted by attacks on educational facilities and school

closures. All remain without access to education or even a safe place to shelter.

The Ministry of Education in Gaza reports that between 7 October 2023 and 17 January 2024, 4,327 Palestinian students and 231 teachers and school administrators were killed, while 7,819 students and 756 teachers and administrators were injured. To date, 281 government schools and 65 schools belonging to UNRWA have been completely or partially destroyed. In addition to UNRWA schools, some 133 government schools are being used as shelters for Palestinians who have fled and/or lost their homes. However, roughly 90% of school buildings in Gaza, including those being used as shelters, have sustained varying degrees of damage; 29% have been completely or partially destroyed. Combined, these schools previously served some 433,000 children and employed more than 16,200 teachers.

Israeli forces have also targeted universities and colleges in the Gaza Strip with particular ferocity. These attacks began with the bombing and near total destruction of the Islamic University of Gaza (12 October 2023), the University College of Applied Sciences (19 October 2023), and Al-Azhar University (6 November 2023). They also severely damaged the University College of Applied Sciences and Technology, Al-Aqsa University, and the Palestine Technical College. The bombardment and eventual destruction of Al-Quds Open University (15 November 2023) and Gaza University (4 December 2023) followed. With the complete demolition of Al-Israa University (17 January 2024), Israeli forces destroyed the last remaining major university in Gaza.

Prior to their destruction, some university facilities were occupied by Israeli military forces, while adjacent structures were transformed into detention and interrogation centers for Palestinians. After seizing Al-Israa University and using the site as a military barrack and an ad hoc detention/interrogation center for 70 days, Israeli forces detonated explosives and demolished the university on 17 January. Drone video footage of this demolition was widely distributed on Israeli media. Prior to the Israeli army's occupying the university, there was no evidence that it had been used for any military activities.

In addition to the massive destruction of Gaza's physical educational infrastructure – the rebuilding of which will require many years and billions of dollars – is the systematic killing of our colleagues there. Scholars from across the humanities, social sciences and STEM, widely respected by their peers and students, have been targeted and

murdered. These academics represent the intellectual leadership of the Palestinian community in Gaza and were the foundation for the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge.

The Euro-Mediterranean Observatory for Human Rights [announced](#) on 20 January that it had documented the killing by Israeli military forces of 94 Palestinian university professors. As precise documentation is encumbered by the targeted destruction of communications towers, routine internet blackouts, and deliberate attacks on Ministry of Education administrative staff and their families, we provide below only a partial list of the names of those scholars and, where available, their academic affiliation. These individuals represent only a small percentage of the hundreds of faculty and staff and thousands of students and their families who have been killed in military assaults, bombings, or through prolonged exposure to starvation and disease since 7 October 2023.

University Presidents:

Professor Sufyan Tayeh, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Said Al-Zibda, University College of Applied Sciences  
Professor Muhammad Eid Shabir, former President, Islamic University of Gaza

Deans:

Dean Ibrahim al-Astal, Islamic University of Gaza  
Dean Khitam Al-Wasifi, Islamic University of Gaza  
Dean Mahmoud Abu Daf, Islamic University of Gaza  
Dean Omar Farwanah, Islamic University of Gaza  
Dean Taysir Ibrahim, Islamic University of Gaza  
Dean Ahmed Abu Absa, University of Palestine  
Dean Ahmed Al-Dalu, University Of Palestine

Professor Adham Hassouna, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Ahmad Mahmoud al-Qara, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Nesma Abu Shaqra, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Abdel-Nasir Al-Saqqa, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Nidal Qaddura, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Wiesam Essa, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Fadil Abu Hain, Al-Aqsa University  
Professor Jihad Al-Masri, Al-Quds Open University  
Professor Hassan Kafarneh, Al-Quds Open University  
Professor Muhammed Atef Awad, Al-Quds Open University  
Professor Muhammad Al-Nabahin, Al-Quds Open University  
Professor Ibrahim Barhoum Abu Salah, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Islam Suleiman Haboush, Islamic University of Gaza

Professor Midhat Saidem, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Nahed Al-Rafati, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Refaat AlAreer, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Mohammed Awad, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Rizq Arruq, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Amin Al-Bahtiti, Al-Azhar University of Gaza  
Professor Ali AlQirinawi, University of Palestine  
Professor Ibrahim Saidam, University of Palestine  
Professor Mustafa Al-Laqta, University of Palestine  
Professor Mustafa Al-Naqib, University of Palestine  
Professor Naim Baroud, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Azzu Affanah, Islamic University of Gaza (Deputy Dean)  
Professor Muhammad Bakhit, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Salem Abu-Mukhdah, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Muhammad Dabbour Assad, Islamic University of Gaza  
Director Tareq Thabet, University College of Applied Sciences  
Professor Shaher Yaghi, University College of Applied Sciences  
Dr. Rafet Lobad  
Professor Khalil Abu Yahya  
Professor Wael Al-Zard  
Dr. Maisara Al-Rayyes  
Professor Sereen Al-Attar  
Professor Usama Al-Muzayni  
Professor Ismail Abu Sa'adah  
Professor Khaled Al-Ramlawi  
Professor Said Al-Dahshan  
Professor Raed Qaddura  
Professor Muhammad Abu-Zur  
Professor Yusuf Juma'a Salameh  
Professor Nida Affanah  
Professor Mu'min Shuwaydah  
Professor Siddiq Nassar  
Professor Ahmad Abu Saadah  
Professor Jamilah Al-Shanti  
Professor Muhamamd Jamil Za'anin  
Professor Ismail Al-Ghamri  
Professor Walid Al-Amudi  
Professor Abdullah Al-Amudi  
Professor Hassan Al-Radi'  
Professor Muhammad Abu Amara  
Professor Mahmud Al-Loh  
Professor Khalid Al-Najjar  
Professor Muhammad Al-Najjar  
Professor Sharif Al-Assali, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Muhammad Hassounah



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Professor Yasir Radwan  
Professor Jihad Al-Baz  
Professor Hazem Al-Jamali  
Professor Nasir Al-Yafawi, Islamic University of Gaza  
Professor Jihad Al-Masri  
Professor Ismail Abu Saada  
Professor Muhammad Nassar

As evidenced by the many letters our committee has written to you (among them, letters dated: [26 May 2022](#); [8 February 2022](#); [21 July 2021](#); [13 April 2021](#)), your government and armed forces have engaged in persistent gross violations of international legal norms in your unrelenting attacks against Palestinian academics and students. In our previous letter on Gaza ([21 November 2023](#)), we insisted that as the occupying authority, your targeting of Palestinian educational buildings through bombings and other forms of aggression and incursions constituted a violation of the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#) of 1949, relating to the protection of civilians in time of war. Your government and military's resultant obstruction of education has also been a clear violation of the right to education enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The right to education is binding under all circumstances and to be protected in all situations, including during crises and emergencies resulting from civil strife and [war](#). Israel is a party to the UDHR and a signatory to the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them.

The depth and breadth of the killing and destruction have now gone far beyond any previous violations your government and its military have committed. Rather, the massive assaults against educational infrastructure, educators and students at all levels and throughout Gaza since 7 October have emerged as part of a larger campaign of ethnic cleansing [intended to destroy](#) the very foundations and bases of continued Palestinian life in Gaza.

We thus join the millions of protestors around the world and call in the strongest possible terms for an immediate cease-fire, a lifting of the siege and the termination of what appears to be a genocidal campaign against the people of Gaza.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asli Ü. Bâli'.

Aslı Ü. Bâli

MESA President

Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Joseph R. Biden, President, United States of America

Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State, United States of America

Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense, United States of America

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Ambassador to the UN, United States of America

Josep Borrell-Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer - Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), European Parliament

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories



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Farida Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education

James Heenan, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ramallah

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, MENA section

Noha Bawazir, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative, UNESCO Liaison Office, Ramallah, Palestinian delegation to UNESCO

The Honorable Veronica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression