



**Middle
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21 November 2023

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
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Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant
pniot@mod.gov.il

Brigadier General Hisham Ibrahim
Head of Civil Administration in the West Bank, Coordination of Government
Activities in the Territories (COGAT)
Fax: +972-2-6599133

Prime Minister Netanyahu, Minister Gallant, General Ibrahim,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to condemn and demand an end to your ongoing military assaults against the Palestinians of Gaza. The human toll to date stands at more than 13,000 dead and more than 30,000 [wounded](#). Just as grave as the killing of civilians is the massive displacement of some 70% of the Gazan population and the wanton destruction of basic infrastructure. As educators, we focus our outrage here on the unspeakable number of students, teachers and staff killed or injured, as well as the massive destruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure, from primary schools through university.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 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 outside of North America.

Given the devastating death toll, with an estimated 40% of that number being children, there is no question that thousands of Palestinian youth of school age have been killed, and thousands more wounded: the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that as of ten days ago, 11 November, at least 3,117 school students and 183 educational staff had been killed in Gaza and more than 4,613 students and 403 teachers had been [injured](#). In addition to this dreadful and still rising human toll, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR), as of 6 November, more than 400 faculty have been killed and nine higher education buildings had been completely or partially damaged, among them the [Islamic University of Gaza](#), [Al-Azhar University](#), the [North Gaza and Tubas branches of Al-Quds Open University](#), and buildings of An-Najah National University located at the Palestine Technical University - [Kadoorie](#). Education has been completely disrupted in 19 higher education institutions, affecting



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88,000 students. Indeed, as of 13 November, about 300 school buildings (61 per cent of all such buildings in Gaza) have sustained [damage](#). In addition, the war has prevented 555 students from Gaza from enrolling in [scholarships abroad](#). As a result of the ongoing death, displacement, and destruction, on 6 November the Palestinian Ministry of Education suspended the 2023-2024 school year for the 625,000 schoolchildren in the Gaza Strip. As our Board's 26 October statement warned, the cumulative effect of your attack on Gaza imperils "even the possibility of access to education for generations of Gazan children and students into the indefinite [future](#)."

As the occupying authority, your targeting of educational buildings in Gaza through bombing as well as other forms of damage or incursions constitutes a violation of the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#) of 1949, relating to the protection of civilians in time of war. The resultant obstruction of education is also 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 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.

We demand that you assume your responsibilities as occupying power and signatory to the above-cited conventions and cease these vicious attacks against the educational infrastructure of Gaza and the Gazans who teach, study and work there. We also join the millions of protestors around the world and call in the strongest possible terms for an immediate cease-fire.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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



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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

Samantha Power, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development

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

Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories

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



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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