Vancouver Senate

THE FIRST SPECIAL MEETING OF THE VANCOUVER SENATE FOR THE 2023/2024 ACADEMIC YEAR

MOMDAY, 3 JUNE 2024
12 Noon to 1:15 PM
VIA ZOOM

1. Call to Order and Territorial Acknowledgement – Dr Benoit-Antoine Bacon

2. Recommendations from the Senate Agenda Committee for this Meeting – Kamil Kanji (approval) (NB: Requires 2/3rds in favour)

3. Remarks from the Chair – Dr Benoit-Antoine Bacon (information)

4. Discussion of the Ongoing Violence in Israel and Palestine and Consideration of a Motion Regarding Cutting or Suspending Academic Ties with Israeli Government Entities (Including Public Universities) – Dr Brenna Bhandar and Jasper Lorien

   a) Background Documents Submitted in Response to the Call for Meeting (information)
      i. Footnotes for the proposed motion
      ii. Materials from Maya Wind, UBC Anthropology
      iii. Materials from Neve Gordon, Queen Mary University of London
      iv. Materials from UBC Faculty and Staff of the Jewish Academic Alliance of BC
      v. Materials from Tel Aviv University
      vi. Materials from Alan Jacobs, UBC Political Science
      vii. Materials from Guy Stecklov, UBC Sociology
      viii. Materials from Karen Gelmon, UBC Medicine
      ix. Materials from Michael Hayden, UBC Medical Genetics
      x. Materials from Naama Koreh, UBC Exchange Student
      xi. Materials from the Association for Jewish Studies
xii. Materials from Gregg Gardiner, UBC Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies

xiii. Materials from Francis Andrew, UBC Convocation Member

xiv. Materials from Stephen Pelech, UBC Neurology

b) Motion proposed by Senator Bhandar (approval)

Whereas the Vancouver Senate has twice previously voted to cut or suspend ties with universities suspected of being connected to violations of human rights and breaches of international law;

Whereas the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found, on 26 January 2024, that Israel’s actions in the Gaza Strip constitute a plausible risk to the rights of Palestinians to be protected from genocide as per Article III of the Genocide Convention, of which Canada is a signatory;

Whereas the ICJ, on 24 May 2024, ordered Israel to immediately halt its military offensive and all other actions in the Rafah Governorate, because “the humanitarian situation [in Rafah] is now to be characterized as disastrous”;

Whereas the Prosecutor for the International Criminal Court has stated that “Israel has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival”, that this constitutes a “common plan to use starvation as a method of war and other acts of violence against the Gazan civilian population...”;

Whereas, according to the Independent Experts of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Israel has destroyed civilian educational infrastructure including every university in the Gaza Strip (in whole or in
part), libraries, archives, schools, heritage sites, and museums, leaving at least 625,000 students with no access to education;

Whereas, according to the Independent Experts of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Israel’s “systematic and widespread destruction of housing, services and civilian infrastructure represents a crime against humanity”; 

Whereas, according to the Times of Israel, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem suspended Dr. Shalhoub-Kevorkian for speaking against the actions of Israel and, according to Adalah’s Report to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, hundreds of students in Israel have had disciplinary proceedings taken against them for private social media posts critical of Israel, constituting a violation of academic freedom;

Whereas Tel Aviv University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology have all stated that they have direct ties to the Israeli military, including joint centres, military technology development programs, and/or military training programs;

Be it resolved that the Vancouver Senate approve and recommend to the Council of Senates and Board of Governors, as appropriate, the suspension of academic agreements (including but not limited to research agreements and student/faculty mobility agreements) with Israeli government entities, including public universities, for faculties of the Vancouver campus of UBC until further notice. This resolution shall not be taken to affect the academic freedom of individual faculty members to participate in individual research or funding agreements; and
Be it further resolved that the Vancouver Senate condemns the actions committed by Hamas on October 7th and supports the ICC investigation into those actions, as well as all peaceful efforts to advocate for the release of the remaining hostages.

5. Adjournment
25 May 2025

To:    Vancouver Senate

From:  Senate Agenda Committee

Re:    Recommendations from the Senate Agenda Committee for the Special meeting of Senate.

This Special Meeting of Senate has been called as required under Rule 18 (c) of the Rules and Procedures of Senate after receipt of a petition signed by 18 members of Senate. Under the Senate’s rules, such a meeting must occur within 21 days of receipt. As the Senate is in its summer recess and this meeting was not expected, scheduling and timing of this meeting presents challenges, as does preparation of materials and gathering of necessary data to have an informed meeting.

The Senate Agenda Committee has considered this situation and in particular Senate’s usual rules around debate and voting.

With respect to debate, current Senate rules provide that each member may speak twice to each motion (and again to any amendments thereunto) and for no more than 10 minutes each time. With 90 members of Senate, this would be 30 hours of debate on a main motion alone, plus any additional time for procedural matters and the same for any amendments. The Agenda Committee recognizes the limited time available in this special meeting, and thus recommends that for this meeting, the time be reduced to 3 minutes each time. In the interests of time, the Agenda Committee would also ask senators to please not be repetitive or reiterative in debate: if one agrees with what was said by another senator, please just state that and your support or opposition to a matter.

The Agenda Committee is aware that some members of Senate have indicated that they have other obligations after this meeting, and that debate may go on for some time. The Agenda Committee would only recommend a brief extension to the time to adjourn if it is apparent debate is coming to close. If there are many members who wish to continue to debate, or it appears a resolution is not imminent, the Agenda Committee would recommend that a motion to call the question, to postpone consideration to the September regular meeting or to another special meeting, to postpone indefinitely, or to refer the matter to a committee for further review and recommendation to Senate be considered instead of extending the time to adjourn.

With respect to voting, the Agenda Committee is aware of the emotional sensitivities around this subject matter, and of the disrespectful and intimidating correspondence received by some members both in support of and against this motion. Given this, the Agenda Committee would recommend that voting on the main motion and any amendments thereto occur by secret ballot.
The Agenda Committee would therefore recommend that Senate resolve as follows:

That Rule 2 notwithstanding, debate at this special meeting be limited to no more than (2) two times on each motion by a senator, and for no more than three (3) minutes each time; and

That Rule 22(a) be suspended for the motion proposed by Senator Bhandar and any incidental or subsidiary motions thereto, and in its place voting occur by secret ballot at this special meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Kamil Kanji, Chair
Senate Agenda Committee
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Be it further resolved that the Vancouver Senate condemns the actions committed by Hamas on October 7th and supports the ICC investigation into those actions, as well as all peaceful efforts to advocate for the release of the remaining hostages.
In 2022, the Vancouver Senate unanimously voted to cut ties with Russian governmental entities in response to the invasion of Ukraine, condemning “the illegal invasion of any sovereign territory by another power and human rights violations involving civilians.” In 2023, the Vancouver Senate voted to defer the approval of an agreement with the Chulalongkorn University due to concerns about its human rights record.


Adalah (2024, March 15). Israeli Academic Institutions Sanction Palestinian Students for Social Media Posts since 7 October, violating their Rights to Free Expression and Education. The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. https://www.adalah.org/uploads/uploads/Adalah%E2%80%99s%20Report%20to%20the%20UN%20Special%20Rapporteur%20on%20Education.pdf

Tel Aviv University has a joint center with the Israeli military and runs a military training program in partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Defense:

Tel Aviv University. For the 1st time at an Israeli university: Air and space power center. (2022, January 5). https://english.tau.ac.il/news/air-and-space-power;

Rapoport, Meron, "'It'll turn campus into an army base': Tel Aviv University to host soldiers' program," +972 Magazine, 4 October 2023, https://www.972mag.com/tau-army-militarization-palestinian-students/

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem runs several military training programs in partnership with the IDF and boasted that it “provided diverse logistics equipment to several military units”: Ahronheim, A. (2019, April 15). Jerusalem’s Hebrew University to host Military Intelligence Program. The Jerusalem Post | JPost.com, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/jerusalems-hebrew-university-to-host-military-intelligence-program-586822;

Course catalog. (n.d.). https://www.havatzaIot.org;


Course catalog. (n.d.). https://www.havatzaIot.org;


Course catalog. (n.d.). https://www.havatzaIot.org;
Technion-Israel Institute of Technology wrote a press release praising a remote-operated bulldozer that it developed to be used as military technology by the IDF and runs an academic training program in partnership with the Israeli military:


IDF. (2016, December 19). [เทคนיק סולו. מתגיסים.](https://www.mitgaisim.idf.il/%D7%9B%D7%AA%D7%91%D7%95%D7%91)
Materials from Maya Wind

I write to submit my support for the UBC senate motion calling to suspend UBC’s ties with the Israeli government and its public universities.

I write this letter as a member of the UBC community, where I am a Killam postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Anthropology. I also write this as a Jewish Israeli and the author of a recently published book documenting the structural complicity of Israeli universities in Israel’s violation of Palestinian rights.

Israel is currently committing plausible genocide in Gaza and has destroyed every university in the Gaza Strip and has killed university presidents, deans, faculty and students. Israeli universities have enabled the Israeli government to carry out this destruction, through training soldiers, developing weapons, and producing legal scholarship and hasbara (state propaganda) to sustain Israeli impunity. It is particularly urgent for us in the Western academic community to address our own complicity in the decimation of Palestinian higher education and killing of our colleagues. At UBC and across Western universities, our own institutions legitimate, fund, and support the Israeli university system, making us all complicit in the denial of the Palestinian right to education and academic freedom for Palestinians and critical Jewish Israelis.

Israeli universities have long been pillars of Israel’s system of apartheid, now recognized by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UN Special Rapporteurs, among others. I would like to highlight some key findings from my own research below, to demonstrate why it is essential to hold Israeli universities accountable for their longstanding violations of human rights and international law.

Israeli universities were designed and built as pillar of regional demographic engineering. They were not only founded as land-grab institutions on stolen Palestinian lands, but also themselves serve as engines of continued Palestinian dispossession. Their own campuses and programs sustain the theft of Palestinian lands by Israel coupled with the planned expansion of Jewish settlement in areas of strategic concern to the Israeli state, a program officially called “Judaization.” In the Galilee, the most populous Palestinian region within Israeli borders, the University of Haifa plays a key role in regional “Judaization”; Likewise in the Naqab, the region most sparsely populated by Jewish Israelis, Ben Gurion University anchors Palestinian Bedouin displacement and replacement. In the illegal settlement of Ariel in the occupied West Bank, Ariel University anchors settlement expansion and Palestinian land appropriation.

Diverse academic disciplines have for decades subordinated their research to the requirements of the Israeli state, aiding the Israeli government in ruling over millions of Palestinians with an illegal military occupation. Two noteworthy examples are the discipline of archaeology, which constructs evidence to support Israeli land claims through erasure of Arab and Muslim history, and substantiates Israeli use of excavations to expand Jewish settlement and expropriate Palestinian land. The discipline of legal studies—including ethics, law, and criminology—create a discursive and legal infrastructure to justify Israeli violations of international human rights law and the laws of war, continually developing legal interpretations that shield the Israeli state from
accountability for its permanent military occupation and war crimes across offensives in the Gaza Strip between 2008-2024.

Israeli academic knowledge production not only developed through ties to the Israeli government but was often itself steered toward direct military applications. Israeli universities designed — and continue to run — tailored academic programs to train soldiers and security forces to carry out their work and to enhance their operations, rendering Israeli military and academic training one and the same. This includes training Intelligence Corps soldiers trained to conduct comprehensive surveillance of Palestinian society, with soldiers graduating from this program creating mass target banks to guide Israeli killing in the Gaza Strip since October 2023.

The development of Israeli higher education was imbricated with the rise of Israeli military industries, and Israeli universities still sustain them. Rafael and Israeli Aerospace Industries, two of Israel’s largest weapons producers, developed out of infrastructure laid by the Weizmann Institute and the Technion. Today, Israeli universities collaborate with Israeli weapons corporations to research and develop technology that is used by the Israeli military and security state in the occupied Palestinian Territory. This technology used to serve Israeli military operations and tactics that have already been deemed war crimes, is later sold abroad as field-tested or “battle proven.”

Israeli universities not only serve the Israeli apartheid regime, but themselves differentially grant rights on their own campuses. Critical scholars, primarily Palestinian, who seek to conduct research about the Nakba and ongoing Israeli state violence face intimidation, silencing and repression within their own institutions. This longstanding repression has escalated in recent months, as illuminated by the suspension of Palestinian Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian from Hebrew University. The campaign to delegitimize Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s critical scholarship and expression about Israeli military conduct in Gaza by Hebrew University emboldened the Israeli police to arrest her. Her investigation by the Israeli police on the basis of her critical research is ongoing, and her academic works in progress, books, cellphone and computer remain in police custody.

University administrations apply university policy differently towards their Palestinian and Jewish students. Administrations use disciplinary committees to police Palestinian student organizers, routinely refuse to authorize events by Palestinian student groups and suspended their associations altogether. The escalation of this repression of Palestinian student expression and dissent since October 2023 has recently been recently documented and analyzed by the civil rights organization Adalah.

Given the systematic nature of the complicity of Israeli universities in the violation of Palestinian rights, and their recent active support for the Israeli military and government committing plausible genocide, it is urgent for UBC to suspend all ties with Israeli universities and uphold the commitment to human rights and academic freedom for all.
Neve Gordon and Penny Green

On April 18 Israeli police arrested the scholar Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian at her home in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. Despite her long-standing and publicly acclaimed research and activism on Palestinian women and children in East Jerusalem, the arrival of Israel police at her door was a shock. They confiscated her cell phone, her computer, posters made by the nonprofit Defense for Children International and a volume of poetry by Mahmoud Darwish. charged her with suspicion “of severe incitement against the State of Israel for statements made against Zionism and claims that Israel is currently committing genocide in Gaza.”

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, is the Lawrence D. Biele Chair in Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (She is also a colleague of ours at Queen Mary University of London.) For six hours the police interrogated her about public statements she had made since October 7 and a few of her academic articles. They then shackled her wrists and ankles and took her to the Russian Compound, a detention center located near the Jerusalem city hall. She told Haaretz she was stripped and searched by a policewoman who cursed her, accused her of being part of Hamas, and told her to “burn and die.”

A second officer took her to a cell, threw a mattress on the floor, and locked her in. “I was shivering with cold,” she remembered.

I asked for a blanket, and they brought me one that smelled of garbage and urine and was also wet. I sat on the bed until morning, my ears and nose started to bleed, I threw up, washed my face, and went back to bed. I don't know how something like this happens to someone my age. The light was very strong and there was noise. The cold was terrible, my teeth were chattering, even though the blanket smelled and was wet, in the end I covered myself with it because I couldn't stand the cold.

At a hearing the following morning, the state prosecutor asked the Jerusalem Magistrates Court to extend Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s detention. The judge, lacking evidence of the “danger” she posed, dismissed the request and she was released on bail. She has since been summoned for three further interrogations.

In academic writing published over the past several decades, Shalhoub-Kevorkian analyzes the experience of Palestinian children living under occupation. Her scholarship casts light on Israel’s degrading and inhumane treatment of children and youth: according to Defense for Children International, close to a thousand children were killed, many more maimed, and thousands incarcerated by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the decade leading up to the current Gaza war. She calls such practices “unchilding,” a process of harsh subjugation. “Although I research these things,” she said, “I never felt them on my flesh.”

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On October 26—by which point Israel had killed over seven thousand Palestinians in Gaza, of whom nearly three thousand were children—Shalhoub-Kevorkian signed and circulated a petition titled “Childhood Researchers and Students Calling for Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza.” The petition, which has now gathered 2,492 signatures from scholars around the world, demanded an immediate ceasefire and an end to what it called the “Western-backed Israeli genocide” and the “egregious violation of Palestinian children’s rights.”
Three days later Hebrew University’s president, Asher Cohen, and its rector, Tamir Sheafer, sent Shalhoub-Kevorkian a letter. They were, they wrote, “astonished, disgusted and deeply disappointed” by her decision to sign the document—an act “not very far from crimes of incitement and sedition.” Israel’s actions in Gaza, the university’s leaders insisted, did “not come close to the definition of genocide.” Hamas’s massacre of October 7, on the other hand, met it “completely.” They concluded, “We are sorry and ashamed that the Hebrew University includes a faculty member like you. In light of your feelings, we believe that it is appropriate for you to consider leaving your position.”

The university went on to disseminate its letter on social media, where Shalhoub-Kevorkian met with a barrage of hateful messages and violent threats. But everything she had said and done was within the law, and her tenure protected her from dismissal; in effect, the university’s leaders had resorted to bullying her into leaving.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian decided to stay. The following March, she was interviewed on the podcast Makdisi Street; her comments there made her an even greater target. On Makdisi Street, she referenced Israel’s policy of withholding the corpses of Palestinians whom it had killed in military operations or who had died while in custody—a practice widely documented, by rights groups like B’Tselem and Human Rights Watch as well as in a series of Supreme Court cases since at least 1981. Later the conversation turned to the perception that Israel was using stories of sexual violence from October 7 to justify violence in Gaza. She lamented the fact of sexual abuse. “I will never approve it, not to Israelis nor to Palestinians and not in my name…. If a woman says she is raped I will believe her,” she said. “The issue is, is Israel allowing proper collection of evidence?...We don’t see women coming out and saying what happened, so women’s bodies are being used as political weapons.”

Taking offence to the accusation, a reporter on Israeli television picked up these remarks, and subsequently a member of the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) named Sharren Haskel called on Hebrew University to intervene. In a statement in response, the president and rector reiterated that they were ashamed that Shalhoub-Kevorkian was on their faculty. Accusing her of “cynically” using free speech and academic freedom to “divide and incite,” they announced that they had decided to suspend her from all teaching responsibilities.

They ended their statement by declaring the institution a Zionist university, implying that it has no place for non-Zionist or anti-Zionist students, faculty, or staff. Only after a series of letters from faculty members—who argued that the president and provost had overreached their authority—and academics from abroad did the university’s leaders meet with Shalhoub-Kevorkian and cancel the suspension, on the grounds that she had clarified her position about the rape charges. Three weeks later came Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s arrest. At no point in the weeks that followed did the university’s leaders send a representative to her side.

What explains the intensity of these attacks? Shalhoub-Kevorkian's story underlines how fragile academic freedom can be when it comes under political pressure. It also offers a window into the assault on Palestinian students and staff in Israeli higher education after October 7. In the three weeks following Hamas’s attack, well over a hundred Palestinian students in Israel, nearly 80 percent of them women, faced disciplinary actions for private social media posts that supported the end of the siege on Gaza, celebrated the bulldozing of the Gaza border fence on October 7, expressed empathy with Palestinians in the Strip, or simply included memes about suffering Palestinian children. When word got out of arrests,
investigations, suspensions, and expulsions, many Palestinian students and faculty stopped posting or sharing on social media. Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s treatment months later made it clear that this wave of repression had hardly abated.

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With the exception of a handful of Jewish–Palestinian primary and secondary schools, which cater to about 1,500 of Israel’s more than two million schoolchildren, Israeli universities are the only educational institutions where Palestinian and Jewish students meet. Over the years enrollment has risen among Palestinians, who make up twenty percent of the country’s citizens and currently comprise just over 16 percent of bachelor’s degree students, 11 percent of master’s students, and 8 percent of Ph.D. students. They have long been subject to disproportionate penalties for their speech. In her book *Towers of Ivory and Steel*, the anthropologist Maya Wind reports, for instance, that in 2002, at the height of Israel’s military offensives in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian students at the University of Haifa were brought before disciplinary hearings and suspended for peacefully protesting. At the time they comprised 40 percent of the school’s student body, but between that year and 2010 they made up over 90 percent of the students summoned to disciplinary committees. In the following five years leading to 2015, Palestinians remained three times as likely to be summoned before the committee as their Jewish peers.

At least since 2007, when the “Students’ Rights Law” came into force, many of these disciplinary committees have overreached their authority. Article 17 of that legislation specifies that “an institution will establish and publicize, in accordance with the provisions of this law, a behavioral code for the behavior of applicants and students regarding their studies at the institution, including behavior during class and while at the institution’s facilities, as well as in the student dormitories.” [Nowhere does the law give?] higher education institutions the legal authority to monitor and persecute students for their extramural statements or activities, including posts on their private social media accounts.

Even Palestinian students keenly aware of previous periods of repression could not have anticipated just how widely universities would disregard such protections after Hamas’s attack. The wave of suspensions began within days. By October 9 the human rights organization Adalah, which focuses on the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel, had received a request to offer legal assistance to seven Palestinian students temporarily suspended from Haifa University. Unlike Shalhoub-Kevorkian, they were being punished for posts they shared among friends or on private social media accounts many of which expressed empathy with the Gazans under violent attack. Gur Alroey, the university’s rector, sent each student a one-sentence email: “In light of your statement on social media and your support for the terrorist attack on the settlements surrounding Gaza and the murder of innocents, you are suspended from your studies at the University of Haifa until the matter is investigated.”

Normally Adalah deals with a handful of student complaints a year. Now, however, it was inundated with dozens of requests for legal representation. It became clear that right-wing organizations like Im Tirtzu—which according to a Jerusalem District Court ruling has “fascist characteristics” and monitors faculty members as part of its “Know the Anti-Zionist Israeli Professor” project—were mining Palestinian citizens’ social media posts. Initially complaints against Palestinian students were unorganized, but after a day or two Zionist
students started assembling portfolios of their Palestinian classmates’ private social media accounts.

At the Technion, students circulated a PowerPoint presentation on WhatsApp and Telegram that included screenshots of social media posts alongside academic information about sixteen Palestinian students and brief explanations of the “offences” they committed. One student was outed for liking an Instagram image of a bulldozer breaching the fence surrounding Gaza. Zionist students filed scores of complaints against their classmates to universities and colleges, which within days were subjecting Palestinian students to investigations, disciplinary proceedings, suspensions, and expulsions, often before any hearings had taken place. A number of institutions evicted accused students from their dormitories.

On October 12 Israel’s minister of education, Yoav Kish, who chairs the country’s Council for Higher Education, issued a letter directing universities and colleges to “immediately suspend any student or employee who supports the barbaric terrorist acts experienced in the State of Israel, or who supports a terrorist organization, an act of terrorism, an enemy or an enemy state.” All such statements, he wrote, amounted to incitement to terrorism. “In cases where incitement is confirmed,” he went on, universities had to “issue permanent expulsions or terminations.” On October 17 Kish passed a resolution requiring universities to report to the council how they had dealt with such students who “incite and support Hamas.” University leaders were outraged that the government seemed not to trust them.

Some universities were flooded with complaints. A few set up screening committees to sift through social media posts and determine which students to temporarily suspend while a disciplinary committee deliberated whether the students in question could continue their studies. These committees, not unlike the disciplinary panels, operated without statutory authority, and wittingly or not they assisted their institutions in censoring students. Bar Ilan University tweeted that it had established a committee made up of academic, legal, and security experts to examine instances in which members of the university community had made statements identifying with terrorism or engaging in incitement or racism. The tweet included the rector’s email address, so people could send complaints.

“Within two weeks after the attack,” attorney Adi Mansour from Adalah recounts, “we found ourselves representing seventy-four Palestinian students in twenty-five institutions of higher education, including thirteen from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and the seven from the University of Haifa.” Several other students were represented by Academy for Equality or private lawyers. The vast majority of them were suspended for expressing solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, conveying empathy for their suffering, or for quoting verses from the Quran. In most letters suspending the students and calling them into disciplinary hearings, the institution noted that as part of the procedure it had also sent their details to the police. Several students were arrested, interrogated, and even indicted for posting an image from October 7 of Palestinian children rejoicing on a captured military jeep. The students were stripped, searched, and humiliated: a twenty-three-year old Technion student told The Washington Post that she underwent three strip-searches and was woken up for roll call every hour of the night. Some were slapped and pushed; several alleged that the guards had exposed them to the cold, offered them food not “fit for animals,” moved them from facility to facility, and held them in small, closed-off rooms for hours on end before transferring them to grossly overcrowded cells. The same Technion student told PBS Newshour what had happened to other female students in her cell: “I had my hijab, but the other girls, they seized
them from their bedrooms and did not allow them to put veils on their heads. Then they put
garbage bags on their heads.”

In another case, some sixty police officers stormed a student’s family home. At work when
he learned about the raid, he went to the police station, where he was interrogated, then taken
to Megiddo Prison and held in what lawyers described as “deplorable conditions.” After two
weeks, he was released in the middle of the night. No charges were ever filed against him.

Adalah’s lawyers accompanied university and college students to their disciplinary hearings.
Attorney Lubna Tuma, who has gone to more than seventy disciplinary procedures during the
past seven months, described them to us as farcical and draconian. In one case she
represented a student who was suspended for sharing the Quranic verse “Their appointed
time is the morning. Is not the morning near?” on October 7. In a reversal of the presumption
of innocence, she remembered, the judges expected the student to convince them that he did not
support terrorism. They asked him to explain why he had not shared posts condemning
Hamas or the return of the Israeli hostages.

The crucial offense, in many of the hearings, seemed to Tuma to be “hurting the public's
feelings.” But how, she asked, can you prove that the public’s feelings were hurt, particularly
by posts shared only on private accounts with small groups of friends? And who, for that
matter, is meant by “the public”? “In the imagination of most of the academic judges sitting
on disciplinary panels,” she said, it “seems to denote only Israel’s Jewish citizenry.” Tuma
recalled one hearing at Ben-Gurion University in which the disciplinary panel invited a
student whose family members were killed on October 7 to prove that the post in question
was hurtful.

* *

In some cases the disciplinary panels gave their verdict, only for right-wing students to take
matters into their own hands. At Ben-Gurion, a panel decided not to suspend a Palestinian
nursing student who shared a video clip denying some of the violence that took place on
October 7; instead the institution reprimanded her and asked her to volunteer for forty hours
of community service. Students in a WhatsApp group responded with a threat: "If she stays in
this degree, no one will begin the year—the university will be turned upside down.” The
university announced that it would appeal the panel’s decision and the rector, Chaim
Haymes, according to Haaretz, took the matter into his hands. He sent the student an email,
again using the technique of the bully:

Following your conviction by the disciplinary committee, it seems wrong to me that
you should return to school tomorrow as if nothing had happened. I recommend that
you do not come to class tomorrow and that for the next few days, study by yourself
in the library or anywhere else you see fit.

In the appeal, the student was found guilty and suspended for a term—but since all the
courses in the nursing faculty are a year long, she was effectively suspended for twice that
time. This was not the only or first appeal to popular justice.

Already on October 16 the chairperson of the National Union of Israeli Students issued a
letter endorsing the removal of Palestinian students from universities and colleges. Not two
weeks later, a group of Zionist students tried to break into the college dorms in the city of
Netanya, shouting “death to Arabs” as police stood by. And in January, a video clip circulated on Facebook showing students at Emek Yezreel Academic College draped in Israeli flags, standing on a classroom podium, declaring that they will “not sit in the same class with supporters of terrorism.” Many of the Palestinian students who could afford it started looking for alternative university options overseas.

Sometimes individual faculty members contributed to this hostile climate. In October Gad Yair, a professor in the sociology and anthropology department at Hebrew University, posted a video, now taken offline, in which he calls Hamas Nazis and advocates for a “Nakba 2” in Gaza. In an op-ed from October 27, also now taken offline, Eviatar Matania, a political scientist at Tel-Aviv University, called for the complete destruction of Gaza City and the establishment of a park in its place. Neither professor was subjected to disciplinary action. But when, at Haifa University, twenty-five staff members wrote a letter on October 14 criticising the suspension of Palestinian students without due process, over 10,000 people signed a petition demanding that the signatories be dismissed.

Palestinian academic faculty are a small minority: Palestinians make up a fifth of Israel’s citizens but just 3.5 percent of its university teaching staff, and in their academic departments they are almost always the only non-Jewish staff member. They too were targeted. On October 29 Arye Rattner, the president of Kaye Academic College of Education, sent a letter notifying the school’s staff that the college administration had received several complaints about social media from students and faculty members. “Management,” he wrote, “decided to act with a heavy hand and zero tolerance towards these cases,” including by expelling a student from her studies and firing an academic staff member. “Publications condemning the activities of IDF soldiers defending the State of Israel,” the president stressed, “will be met with zero tolerance.”

Jewish faculty members were not entirely immune. On October 25 Yoseph Frost, the president of David Yellin Academic College for Education, summoned Nurit Peled-Elhanan, a renowned scholar who studies the portrayal of Palestinians in children’s Hebrew textbooks, to a disciplinary hearing. She was charged with sending messages on a staff WhatsApp group that criticized Gad Yair’s conflation of Nazis with Hamas and invoked Jean-Paul Sartre’s analysis of the violence that subjugated people adopt to free themselves from colonialism. To Frost, these WhatsApp notes evinced “understanding for the horrific act of Hamas” and “justification of their criminal act.”

The disciplinary committee was satisfied with reprimanding Peled-Elhanan, but she resigned. “The values we used to know have long since been overturned,” she wrote in a Haaretz editorial explaining her decision:

To say that [Hamas’s] attack and massacre occurred in a context, and that it was not an antisemitic pogrom born out of nowhere, is considered a more terrible crime than murder in this country…. Words have become dangerous and lethal bullets legitimate. People who use words are persecuted while murderers enjoy impunity. A person who burned an entire family to death is considered righteous, while anyone who dares to acknowledge the suffering of the residents of Gaza or the West Bank is denounced as a supporter of terrorism.

Meanwhile, in mid-November Achva Academic College, situated between Tel-Aviv and Beer-Sheva, fired a lecturer named Uri Horesh for two posts on his personal Facebook page:
on October 7, he had changed his cover photo to one that says “Free Ghetto Gaza” in Hebrew; a week later, he posted a call to “end the genocide now” and “let Gaza live.” More recently Im Tirzu has been mining petitions signed by academic staff and sending the names to student groups, whose members then demand then their universities fire the signatories. At Sapir College located not far from the Gaza Strip, a lecturer named Regev Nathansohn signed a petition calling on the Biden administration to stop transferring arms and related funds to Israel. He was maligned as a supporter of terrorism, and wrote the rector that he felt unsafe going to campus. In response, the university approved an unpaid leave of absence for six months, though he had requested no such thing.

*  

On October 24, the Committee of Academic Freedom of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies—which one of us, Neve Gordon, chairs—sent a letter to the presidents of every Israeli university stressing the importance of defending the rights of individuals to express views that others may find offensive or challenging. It also highlighted the institutional duty to care for Palestinian students under attack from right-wing students or groups. A number of college leaders replied by characterizing Israel as an island of civilization in the midst of barbarism. Six days later, BRISMES, as the professional association is known, sent President Frost, of David Yellin Academic College for Education, a letter charging that his interpretation of Peled-Elhanan’s text was prejudicial and that the disciplinary hearing had occurred without due process. Frost responded with a warning: “tread carefully.”

But there is clearly an increase in repression. Adalah’s General Director, Hassan Jabareen, represented Shalhoub-Kevorkian in her hearings on her detention on April 19. In his closing remarks to the Jerusalem Magistrates’ Court, he stressed that all her comments, including her criticism of the military, fell under legitimate free expression. Her case, Jabareen noted, was unprecedented in several respects. It was the first time in Israel’s history that Section 144d of the Penal Code—the provision criminalizing public incitement and incitement to racism—had been brought against an academic to extend her detention; the first time that an academic in Israel had been investigated by the police over scholarly articles published in leading English-language international journals; and the first time that the police arrested someone in part for citing factual accounts of Israel withholding the bodies of dead Palestinians.

Jabareen also stressed that 150 professors from the Hebrew University had signed an open letter condemning Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s detention as an infringement of academic freedom. But there is little chance that a relatively small group of dissenting scholars will stem the assault on freedom of speech within Israel’s higher education system. On the contrary, the events of the past seven months suggest how closely the country’s universities are aligned with the imperatives of the state.
Materials Submitted to the UBC Vancouver Senate, May 22, 2024

1. Memo from UBC Faculty and Staff of the Jewish Academic Alliance of BC

2. Letter from the President of Hebrew University

3. Letter from the President of Ben Gurion University

4. Statement against the Boycott of Israeli Academics:
   https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc8NcgnDj_3z50ykNNenGMCRTrWkw4naICNaYxtWgwC_PPXHQ/viewform (note: only the first 2 pages of signatures included in the PDF)


Dear Members of the University of British Columbia - Vancouver Senate:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide submissions in advance of the upcoming meeting above. We respectfully urge you to reject any motion advocating for cutting or suspending academic ties with Israeli government entities, including public entities, for the reasons below.

Executive Summary

Suspending, curtailing, prohibiting, or ending academic ties with Israeli institutions would harm the very people and institutions that are working toward long-term peace. It would be, at best, ineffective in bringing about much-needed change in Israel. Further, it would damage UBC and its community, and would violate the requirement that the University be non-political.

- **Harm in Israel**: Universities in Israel have large and growing Palestinian student bodies, including both Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians living under occupation. Israeli universities have undertaken significant efforts to expand educational opportunities for Palestinian students and are important places of progressive, critical, and egalitarian thought and action. They contain the very voices that should be amplified, rather than silenced, at this time.

- **Ineffectiveness**: There is scant evidence that academic boycotts bring about political change.

- **Damage to Teaching, Research, and Academic Freedom**: Boycotting Israeli institutions would have a direct and damaging effect on ongoing courses and research projects at UBC. This would be contrary to principles of academic freedom. Research and teaching on Judaism and Jewish history would be especially constrained. Other fields, including the sciences, would be negatively impacted; UBC scholars will likely find it challenging to participate in international networks and funding opportunities having a connection with or participation by Israeli entities. The full scope of the impact is unforeseeable.

- **Marginalization of UBC’s Jewish Community**: Regardless of the stated goals of the initiative, most of the Jewish community at UBC would feel marginalized by a selective boycott of a country deeply embedded in their core identity as Jews.
• **Political Neutrality:** BC’s University Act requires that institutions be “non-political in principle.” On such a divisive and politically-charged issue, taking an official stance in favour of one side violates this requirement.

A course of action like this, that may result in both predictable and unforeseen harms, and that has no clear benefits, should not be pursued. Instead we recommend that the Senate consider other avenues for promoting meaningful and unifying work, such as supporting Israeli and Palestinian academics – both those that are citizens of Israel and those living under occupation – who are working toward peace for all peoples.

**Introduction**

As UBC faculty and staff and members of the [Jewish Academic Alliance of BC](https://www.jewishacademicalliance.com), we deplore the deaths and horrendous suffering of civilian populations in Gaza and in Israel on and since October 7, as well as the massive physical destruction in Gaza, including its universities. Like many others at UBC, we want to see a sharp increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza, the release of all hostages and an end to hostilities, an end to any occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, consequences for West Bank settlers who have violated the law and Palestinians’ rights, and self-determination for both Palestinians and Jews in Israel-Palestine. However, we are convinced that a cessation of relationships or a boycott of Israeli academic institutions would be ineffective, if not actually counterproductive, in helping to achieve these goals. It would also be harmful to our own academic community on multiple levels. As President Bacon has recently said, according to the *Vancouver Sun*, “the university respects faculty members who want to engage in academic partnerships.” Overall, we think it would be a mistake for the Senate to rush into a decision to cut ties with Israeli universities. This is not only a decision which many members of our academic community cannot help but see as discriminatory, but also one that puts UBC at reputational risk.

We urge the Senate to consider more meaningful, productive, and unifying ways in which the University could engage with issues of peace and justice in the region. These can include, among other things, programming that brings Israeli and Palestinian scholars (both Israeli citizens and those living under occupation) to campus to support genuine conversation steeped in knowledge and nuanced understanding. Individual members of the UBC community can also engage politically through groups in Israel-Palestine such as [Standing Together](https://www.standingtogether.org) and [A Land For All](https://www.alandforall.org), or locally through progressive organizations such as [JSpace](https://www.jspace.ca) and the [New Israel Fund](https://www.nif.org).

**Considerations**

**Impacts in Israel-Palestine: universities as positive forces for change in Israeli society.**

Israeli universities, while imperfect in their record of treatment of Palestinians, are currently among the institutionalized sites of progressive, egalitarian movements and critical social engagement between groups in Israeli society, with large Palestinian student bodies (over 53,000 in 2019-20). A boycott of these institutions makes little sense as a way of advancing the cause of justice for Palestinians. A boycott of Israeli universities will be harmful for all peoples associated with these universities, not only Israeli Jews.

All universities are shaped by the societies in which they are embedded. Like most countries in the world, Israel is a society marked by racial stratification and prejudice, and Israeli universities have engaged in documented discriminatory practices toward Palestinian students and
employees. Like public universities everywhere, including Canada, Israeli universities also depend on governments for their funding and so are not completely detached from dominant political currents. Like universities everywhere, including Canada, Israeli universities conduct some research with military applications.

On balance, however, Israeli academic institutions play a crucial and distinctive equity-advancing role in Israeli society, expanding opportunities for both Palestinian Citizens of Israel and Palestinians living under occupation. Overall levels of enrollment in higher education have converged rapidly in recent years, with Palestinians – primarily Palestinian citizens of Israel – composing 18.3% of the undergraduate population at Israeli academic institutions in 2019-2020 as compared to 10% in 2009-10, with the share of MA students tripling and the share of PhD students nearly doubling. These developments are not an accident. Since the early to mid-2000s, the leading Israeli universities have engaged in ambitious affirmative action programs (Alon and Malamud 2014) and invested in efforts to expand the pipeline to university for Palestinian youth. As one example, Hebrew University’s Kidma-Sadarah preparatory program annually provides hundreds of Palestinian public high school students from occupied East Jerusalem with language and study skills critical for success at university. At the national level, a collaborative program between Aluma and the Israeli Council for Higher Education strives to increase access to academic education in the Palestinian (including Druze and Bedouin) and Circassian communities within Israel, so that more young adults from those communities are able to pursue higher education.

Substantively, Israeli universities are also sites of critical scholarship and learning about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, race relations, the occupation, and social justice. Israeli academic programs have long been at the forefront of efforts to better engage with Palestinians to promote peace, and to integrate Palestinians into the universities both as faculty and as students. Indeed, the Oslo peace talks themselves were made possible by the work of two Israeli academics, Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, who initiated clandestine meetings with senior PLO officials at a time when Israeli law prohibited direct communication with that organization, engaging as private citizens in a dialogue that would later become a diplomatic initiative. Today, countless research projects, courses, and community engagements connect Jewish and Palestinian students to foster intercommunal collaboration, to fight anti-Palestinian discrimination, and to advance diversity, tolerance and inclusion in classrooms and workplaces. For but a few examples, see the Center for the Study of Multiculturalism & Diversity, the aChord project, the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, and the Multiversitas project. In times of heightened conflict, it stands to reason that more, not less, collaboration on research and critical scholarly production is desirable.

Impacts in Israel-Palestine: ineffective or worse. There is little historical reason to believe that deliberately ending academic ties or initiating academic boycotts have significant liberalizing effects on target governments’ policies (see, e.g., Hyslop, Vally, and Hassim 2006). Worse, an academic boycott may be counterproductive in multiple ways. In Israel, as in most countries, academics play an important role as expert and critical voices in society, held accountable by scholarly review. As Rodin and Yudkin note, “Measures that impede their professional activities and standing may simply weaken the effectiveness of their criticism” within the state. An academic boycott risks accelerating scholarly emigration from Israel, depriving the public sphere of academics’ expertise and advocacy. It also represents “a coercive mode of engagement which frequently generates resentment and intransigence” (Rodin and Yudkin 2010). It is in part
because of academic boycotts’ counterproductive effects that a group of over 5,500 scholars (and counting) from around the world have called on their own institutions to reject such measures. This recent petition echoes the view of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (IHRNASS) who, even while calling out Israeli human rights violations, has nonetheless stated its firm opposition to an academic boycott as a means to addressing the situation.

Harms at UBC: academic freedom. While a boycott of Israeli universities is unlikely to have any discernible effect on advancing Palestinian rights or ending the war, we can be certain that it would do concrete harm to our academic community here at UBC. One major form of harm would be a limitation on the academic freedom of UBC faculty and students: on their ability to engage in research, teaching, and learning on topics of their choosing and to choose with whom they collaborate. Numerous ongoing courses and research projects would be unable to continue to operate. Moreover, a boycott would constrain entire fields of study. Most significantly, research and teaching on Judaism and Jewish history, along with recruitment and retention of faculty and students in these areas, would be directly harmed. Boycotts are effective in one sense – the singling out of Israeli institutions will isolate, shame, and prevent students and professors from even considering collaborations, damaging the academic freedom to choose one’s partnerships. Like the efforts to cancel certain course offerings at UBC that involve Israel, the effect would be to reduce opportunities for learning. Research often has real-world implications, including political ones; but the right path in addressing those implications, in a post-secondary setting, is surely not to prohibit avenues of legitimate research or to put certain areas of learning off-limits. This seems especially true when the impact of such an intellectual boycott is focused on a tiny and historically oppressed ethnic and religious minority who trace their cultural, ethnic, religious and historical roots to the land in question.

The potential damage of a boycott extends across the university including to the sciences, where tackling the significant research challenges requires broad international networks of scholars operating together. As the IHRNASS wrote in Nature, in the context of calls to boycott Israel, moratoria on scientific exchanges “deny our colleagues their rights to freedom of opinion and expression; interfere with their ability to exercise their bona fide academic freedoms; inhibit the free circulation of scientists and scientific ideas; and impose unjust punishment. They would also be an impediment to the instrumental role played by scientists and scholars in the promotion of peace and human rights.” In light of these reasons, major North American peer universities have not conceded to academic boycotts. Conceding to one at UBC would make UBC an outlier among the community of major research universities and put it at reputational risk.

More fundamentally, boycotts operate as a form of social and intellectual shunning, which is antithetical to the free pursuit of scholarly inquiry, the pursuit of knowledge, and the spirit of respectful engagement on which academic freedom and indeed postsecondary education as a whole are premised. Intellectual engagement and social justice itself flourish when individuals and groups engage with one another based on facts and in a spirit of humility, curiosity, and efforts at mutual understanding – rather than through shunning or demonization.

Harms at UBC: impacts on the Jewish community. We understand that calls for an academic boycott of Israel are primarily motivated by concern for Palestinian human rights and Palestinian suffering during the war in Gaza. However, we ask Senators to pause to consider the impact of such a boycott on UBC’s Jewish community. For a majority of Jews, a connection to Israel – whether religious, historic, or familial – is deeply woven into their core identity. In the aftermath
of the Holocaust – itself the culmination of centuries of structural and systemic violence against Jews in Europe – Israel also holds a special place for many Jews as a beacon of safety and the rare place that offered them a refuge from mortal persecution. For Jews hailing from countries in the Middle East and North Africa (who make up about half of all Israeli Jews), their general experience was of arriving to a newly-formed Israel after centuries of legally disprivileged citizenship followed by, very often, forced expulsion or state-tolerated pogroms. Whatever the reasoning of proponents, a boycott of Israeli universities will be understood by most Jewish faculty, students, staff, and alumni as an effort to demonize all of Israeli society and the national place that is home to about half the remaining Jews in the world. Unlike measures directed at Israeli political, economic, or military leaders, a decision to boycott Israeli universities would isolate and ostracize our own academic peers – faculty, students, and staff – in Israel. Such a measure would be understood as all the more marginalizing of Jewish members of our UBC community insofar as it would target Israel alone, while the University continues partnerships with universities in countless countries with deeply problematic human rights and war records. In short, an academic boycott of Israel would send a clear message to much of the University’s and province’s Jewish community that UBC intends to treat Jewish people differently, and worse, than it treats other minority groups, on the basis of Jews’ very identity. As an institution that prides itself in its willingness and ability to engage the general public, beyond the walls of the university, singling out one particular community like this would be detrimental to these efforts.

**Harms at UBC: violation of political neutrality.** As the Office of the Provost recently stated, “UBC must remain institutionally impartial and inclusive on matters that extend beyond its immediate purview. Statements that could compromise the perception of institutional neutrality and inclusivity should not be made in a way that might reasonably be perceived as being made on behalf of UBC, its faculties, departments, institutes, or any other constituent units of UBC.” President Bacon recently reaffirmed this principle of political neutrality, which is grounded both in principles of academic freedom and in BC’s University Act (ss. 66(1), 1), which requires provincial higher-education institutions to be “non-political in principle.” An academic boycott would violate this requirement. We note that targeted divestment from Israel would also raise questions about political neutrality, and we do not support such a move. However, an academic boycott would do so in an even more consequential way by directly imposing a political viewpoint on the University’s core academic activities, including research and teaching.

Our campus, like many around the world, is currently embroiled in vigorous disagreement about the political issues surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Gaza. To date, UBC’s administration has remained largely neutral in this struggle, even to the point of permitting what many in our community consider to be hateful and silencing opinions to be expressed. Many of us wish that UBC would do more to defend intellectual openness and the spirit of inquiry, including by articulating and enforcing expectations around respectful engagement. Other universities, such as the University of Washington, have done so. If this is not possible then UBC should at least be willing to resist further undermining the principles of impartiality and academic freedom. To implement a targeted and selective boycott of Israeli universities now would be to come down firmly on one side of a contentious dispute, a clear violation of UBC’s obligation to remain non-political.
Recommendation

Moral outrage about events in Gaza is understandable and widespread. However, the costs of an academic boycott - to the pursuit of knowledge, to the academic mandate, to academic freedom, to our community, and to principles of fairness and equity - cannot be justified. This is especially true because the benefits of an academic boycott are not clear. On the contrary, an academic boycott would also damage prospects for peace and Palestinian self determination. An academic boycott would weaken the voice and position of Israeli academics, a sector of Israeli society most committed to equity and self determination for all people in Israel/Palestine.

We propose instead that the Senate consider more meaningful and less harmful and divisive action in support of peace and justice in the region. This should include affirming the high value of rigorous and prolific academic research and criticism in producing new knowledge and shedding light on common goals of peace and justice, compassion, and care for all the vulnerable lives in the affected region and elsewhere in the world.

Thanks again for the opportunity to make these submissions.

Respectfully,

UBC Faculty and Staff, Jewish Academic Alliance of BC
Dear Prof. Benoit-Antoine Bacon,

Let us first extend our heartfelt congratulations on your recent appointment as the President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of British Columbia. We wish you much success and fulfillment in your position and look forward to watching the prestige, achievements, and global outreach of the University of British Columbia grow even further under your leadership.

We also wish to thank you for your kind letter of February 27, in which you express your conviction that universities are more important than ever before as a space where different ideas and viewpoints can co-exist and be discussed with the aim of finding solutions. We absolutely and wholeheartedly support the same conviction, as well as your belief that higher education, research and reasoned debate represent our best hope for a better world.

As you know, the University of British Columbia and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have been collaborating for over a decade both at the institutional level with multiple exchange programs for students and faculty, as well as in research and teaching at the level of individual researchers. We nurture and cherish this partnership and hope that it will keep thriving in the future.

We write to you following your decision to hold a special meeting of the Senate “to discuss the ongoing violence in Israel and Palestine and a motion regarding cutting or suspending academic ties with Israeli government entities (including public universities)” from May 16, 2024. We would be grateful if you could share our message with the members of UBC’s Senate.

In what follows we outline some aspects of the academic activity at the Hebrew University, with the aim of demonstrating that an academic boycott against us is morally wrong. Of course, our universities have been working together closely for years, and we trust that you need no further affirmation of our values, ethics, or commitment to academic integrity. Rather than severing ties with Israeli academia, what is needed is greater engagement of intellectuals from around the world across country lines, a goal that can be achieved by strengthening academic cooperation with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and similar institutions in Israel.

Knowing the kind of falsehoods and misrepresentations promoted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, we wish to shed light on our current commitments, actions, and efforts, as well as the painful reality we experience on the ground.
Our institutional independence and critical work

Israeli academia in general and the Hebrew University in particular are independent of the government and operate autonomously in all academic matters, from student admission policy to pedagogical decisions. Researchers make their own decisions what to study and how to do so—and they excel in their work, earning the Hebrew University an internationally acclaimed status as a leading global university. The university fosters free research and discourse, and scholars and students are often harshly critical of governmental policies. The administration has not hesitated to confront the government time and time again (for one example, see here).

Israel’s thriving democracy is characterized by a vibrant liberal camp that plays a crucial role in checking the government’s actions. As in other liberal democracies, studies produced by scholars at the University continuously criticize government policy, propose policy changes, expose injustices of various kinds, and excavate unofficial histories. In the constitutional crisis that preceded the war, faculty and students successfully protested against the government’s plan for judicial overhaul. For much of 2023 hardly a week passed without a Hebrew University faculty member speaking publicly and critically against the government’s proposed plans. Our scholars are also weighing on the current moment academically and publicly, addressing and analyzing all challenges relating to the war. Weakening Israeli academia, as the boycott movement seeks to do, would only undermine this liberal and critical voice and weaken the democratic fabric of Israeli society.

Our commitment and actions to promote equality, multi-culturalism, and free speech

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem shares the University of British Columbia’s commitment to promote excellence and integrity in research, while adhering to principles of academic freedom and social equality and the improvement of the quality of life of all human beings. For us, these are not only abstract values, but also ongoing and active work. The university is actively and extensively engaged in projects aiming to promote equality between Jews and Arab-Palestinians. About 16% of the university’s 24,000 students are Arabs, about half of them Palestinians from East Jerusalem. This did not happen by chance. We have several different programs to recruit and prepare students from every demographic sector in Israel. These efforts include providing prospective Arab students from East Jerusalem with a comprehensive, one-year, tuition-free preparatory program by the University. In this program, they improve their proficiency in the university’s languages of instruction (Hebrew and English). In addition, they receive additional training in science, math, and the social sciences. The goal of the program is not only to attract a diverse set of applicants and first-year students, but to help them succeed at a leading world university. The program attracts almost 500 students each year. This is just one example of the many programs we operate. And, in fact, it is one we operate in the face of objections by the current Israeli government. We also have an extensive program of financial aid and fellowships for Arab students in all degree levels, including programs specifically encouraging and supporting promising candidates in advanced degree and post-doctoral programs. In recent years we have done similar diversity and inclusion work on all fronts, reforming our parental leave policies to increase the flexibility and resources for women scholars, creating special programs and funding to advance the academic careers of women and minorities of all groups in Israel, and much more.
The Hebrew University also works hard to nurture a multi-cultural campus. The University takes seriously its responsibility to do so given that the period of study at the Hebrew University is sometimes the first opportunity for meaningful positive interaction between Jews and Arabs. It requires not only recruiting diverse faculty members and students, which we do, but also creating a welcoming atmosphere and creating meaningful learning opportunities across campus. One of our cornerstone academic programs is Multiversitas, which offers a rich array of classes bringing together faculty and students of various religious and national backgrounds to uncover the challenges of living together in a multi-cultural environment and find sustainable solutions.

The challenge of achieving constructive dialogue among differing perspectives is especially hard in times of war and national conflict, as the one that we are currently facing. The Hebrew University addresses this challenge by employing three main policies: First, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion unit, headed by Vice President Professor Mona Khoury, initiates numerous activities to ensure that all students feel welcome in our campus, and create opportunities for positive engagement and academic success to students from all groups. Second, the Hebrew University provides extensive protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech for both faculty and students. The university allows community members to hold political demonstrations inside the campus and express their views freely. Lastly, the administration of the University takes seriously its role as educators and moral leaders, and thus, while we avoid limiting speech, it does offer our community the administration’s position regarding the appalling nature of hate speech, incitement to racism or to terror. It is this delicate balance, between encouraging free speech and responding to expressions of hatred with counter-speech, which is the heart of our success in protecting this stronghold of liberalism in Jerusalem.

The devastating effects of the October 7th war on our community

At this point, let us say a few words about the effects of the war Hamas-Israel on the Hebrew University. On October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists invaded Israel under the guise of thousands of rockets fired into Israeli towns and cities, massacred over 1,200 Israelis and foreign civilians, incinerated families in their homes, tortured children in front of their parents and parents in front of their children, and brutally raped and mutilated women young and old. Hamas kidnapped more than 240 people, among them toddlers, children, young men and women, and elderly men and women over 80 years old. Two members of the Hebrew University community, Carmel Gat and Sagui Dekel-Chen, were kidnapped from their homes that day and are still held captive, with more than 130 innocent hostages that are still held in Hamas’ captivity, suffering torture and rape and abuse.

In the days, weeks and months since October 7th, Hamas has fired more than 10,000 rockets from Gaza, and Hezbollah has fired more than 5,000 rockets and drones from Lebanon, causing a general shut down of most public institutions and a massive evacuation of population, leading to 200,000 internally displaced citizens. Together with the massive emergency recruitment of reserve forces, many of whom students, Israeli Universities could not open the academic year and researchers could not engage in research for months. The academic year eventually started only at the beginning of 2024 and the academic calendar was severely disrupted, as all faculty and students were required to adapt teaching and learning to a shortened and altered semester format. Students and faculty were forced to leave
their homes. Students and faculty lost family members: siblings, parents, children. Students were heavily injured and forced to stop their studies. No one’s life or work has returned to normalcy. The grave weight of the war continues to take its unbearable toll and upend all areas of life, including academic life.

We deeply mourn the loss of all innocent life in this horrific conflict, whether they are Israeli, Palestinians, or citizens of other countries. We are pained by the tragedy that occurs on both sides of the Gaza border. Our answer to the horrors of war should never be to end academic collaborations and cut ties among researchers. Israeli scientists are not responsible for the war, they are among its victims. Furthermore, they are among the leading voices who can help to elucidate the situation, find solutions, and challenge conceptions and orthodoxies that led the region to this crisis.

Rather than cutting ties, it is imperative to reinforce academic collaborations to ensure that we live up to our shared aspirations to improve the human condition, expand knowledge, and uncover the truth. We welcome initiatives from the University of British Columbia to create and encourage meaningful collaborations with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with the aim of finding solutions to the current crisis, understanding its root causes and overcoming its challenges.

Best,

Prof. Asher Cohen, President
Prof. Tamir Sheafer, Rector

Copies
Prof. Oron Shagrir, Vice-President for International Affairs
Alma Lessing, Director, International Partnerships & Development
19 May 2024

President Benoit Bacon

University of British Columbia

Dear President Bacon,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my concern regarding the UBC senate's proposal to suspend academic ties with Israeli public universities due to the "ongoing violence in Israel and Palestine." While we have not met, I appreciated the warm relationship I had with your predecessor who hosted me in Vancouver several years ago.

The situation in Israel/Palestine is undoubtedly complex with deep historical roots and profound human suffering on both sides. As an Israeli university president, I cannot be unbiased. However, I will strive to address this issue with nuance.

The recent war has been devastating for the Ben-Gurion University (BGU) community located just 40 km from Gaza. On October 7th, we suffered immense personal losses - 75 members of our community murdered, 8 kidnapped to Gaza, over 600 made homeless refugees. The human toll is staggering. Nili Margalit, a nursing faculty member, spent 55 days in captivity not knowing her father was killed. Noa Argamani, a student, was kidnapped and is still held hostage. Baruch Saar, a freshman, was murdered weeks after being kidnapped. Dina Kapitshar, an employee from human resources, was burned alive with her husband and two young children. The list goes on. At the same time, I do not mean to dismiss or diminish the grave suffering also experienced by Palestinians caught up in the ensuing war.

In reflecting on a potential academic boycott of Israeli universities, I would remind us all that boycotts are blunt tools that often undermine the very principles of open discourse that universities should uphold. By severing ties and excluding Israeli scholars, we inevitably lose important perspectives and opportunities for dialogue across conflicts, not to mention the scientific benefit from collaborative research.

The call for boycott seems to single out Israeli institutions while overlooking injustices and human rights violations in many other parts of the world. I am sure that you grapple with Canada's own complicated past and present relationship with its Indigenous communities; we know that human societies globally face deep complexities.
Looking at Israel specifically, it is an ancient land with legitimate claims and connections for multiple peoples, cultures, and religions across millennia. Asserting any one ethnic group’s sole "ancestral" claim oversimplifies a nuanced history. While the modern state of Israel was established in 1948, the region has experienced successive waves of migration, rule, displacement, and conflict over centuries.

BGU itself was founded over 50 years ago with the mission of providing affordable, quality education to underserved populations in Israel's Negev desert, including the Bedouin Arab community. We have had Arab students, faculty and leaders integrated from the beginning. Our efforts to increase representation and foster dialogue continue through programs like the Shared Life Ambassadors initiative.

Moreover, BGU has been actively involved in regional peace and cooperation efforts over the decades. Our campus hosted the historic Israel-Egypt peace treaty signing in 1979. Today, our institutes host students from Palestinian territories and other Arab nations for cross-border educational opportunities that build bridges amidst conflict.

Ultimately, I believe BGU and Israeli academia can serve as vital components of bridging divides - but only through continued partnership and engagement with the global scholarly community. Severing those ties would be detrimental.

While I cannot claim objectivity on this issue, I urge us to avoid overly simplistic judgment and punitive actions that may only enflame tensions further. The path ahead requires nuanced dialogue, compelling Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the conflict peacefully and with respect for all sides' historical ties to this ancient land.

I appreciate you considering this perspective. My hope is that we can work together as institutions of higher learning to foster greater understanding. I look forward to an opportunity to talk with you about this in person.

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Chamovitz, PhD
Statement against the Boycott of Israeli Academics

May 14, 2024

We, scholars from the humanities and social sciences, though not exclusively from these fields, are deeply concerned about the increasing isolation of our academic colleagues in Israel. Calls for boycotts against Israeli academic institutions are not new, but since the brutal attack by Hamas on October 7th and the subsequent Israeli-Hamas War, these calls have taken on a new dimension. On April 12, 2024, the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz published an article based on interviews with over 60 Israeli scholars and reported an astonishing range of discriminatory practices. These include the termination of scientific collaborations, cancellation of conference invitations, refusal to consider scholarly submissions to journals, rejections of promotion evaluations, and withdrawal of offers for academic appointments, among other instances.

Regardless of how each of us currently analyzes the situation on the ground and evaluates the actions of the Israeli government and army, we want to make clear that we stand against all forms of boycotts targeting Israeli scholars and Israeli academic institutions. We firmly advocate for cooperation and continued work with them. We are also convinced that the gradual, often subtle exclusion of Israeli scholars contradicts fundamental principles of professional comportment and academic freedom. Moreover, an academic boycott against Israel is counterproductive regarding internal Israeli debates as well as Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, as Barak Medina argued in his essay Is it Justified to Boycott Israeli Academia?

We strongly believe that international exchange – especially in troubled times like these – is essential for maintaining an open and global academic community. The alarming trend of excluding Israeli scholars from international academic discourse requires unequivocal response on our part. We, the undersigned, call on scholars to stand in solidarity with our Israeli colleagues on this critical issue.

Statement Authors
Anne Rethmann (FU Berlin/Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Daniel Siemens (Newcastle University)
Helmut Walser Smith (Vanderbilt University)

Contact: statement.against.boycott.2024@gmail.com
* Please scroll down, at the end of the list of names you can sign the Statement.
**Please note:** To scholars from around the world who have signed the Statement, we are extremely grateful for your support. Tonight, Monday 20, 2024 at midnight [EST], the public list of signatures will close. We will continue to accept signatures for two more days, only we will not publish them as individual names. Thank you, again—also in the name of the struggle for academic freedom everywhere.

On Monday, May 20, 2024, 23:00 CET: 5566 signatures.
Please bear with us. Typically, it takes a day before new signatures can be added.

1. Joseph Cronin, Leo Baeck Institute London
2. Seyla Benhabib, Yale University and Columbia Law School
3. Steven Pinker, Harvard University
4. Sybille Steinbacher, Fritz Bauer Institut and Goethe-Universität Frankfurt
5. Michael Walzer, Princeton University, NJ
6. Gabriel Rosenfeld, Fairfield University
7. David Blackbourn, Vanderbilt University
8. Jan Grabowski, University of Ottawa
9. Marion Detjen, Bard College Berlin
10. Igor Gak, Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO)
11. Bill Niven, Emeritus, Nottingham Trent University
12. Chad Alan Goldberg, University of Wisconsin-Madison
13. Stefanie Fischer, TU Berlin
14. Jeffrey Herf, Emeritus, University of Maryland, College Park
15. Steven Seegel, University of Texas at Austin
16. Susannah Heschel, Dartmouth College
17. Detlev Claussen, Emeritus, Leibniz Universität Hannover
18. Harry Liebersohn, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
19. Susanne Zepp-Zwirner, Universität Duisburg-Essen
20. Paul Nolte, Freie Universität Berlin
22. Fatema Al Harbi, Director of Sharaka Institute
23. Rainer Kampling, Freie Universität Berlin
24. Christoph Markschies, Academy of Sciences Berlin
25. Yair Mintzker, Princeton University
26. Michael Brenner, American University
27. Andrew I. Port, Wayne State University
28. Michael Wildt, HU Berlin
29. Mikhal Dekel, City College & CUNY Graduate Center
30. Tobias Rosefeldt, Humboldt-Universität Berlin
31. Andreas Arndt, Humboldt University Berlin
32. Hedwig Richter, Universität der Bundeswehr München
33. Abigail Green, University of Oxford
34. Robin Judd, Ohio State University
35. Hans van Nes, Universiteit Antwerpen

*Note: As of May 20, there were some 5,500+ signatures; see https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc8NcgnDj_3z50ykNNenGMCRtqWkw4naiCNaYxtWgwC_PPXHQ/viewform*
In a recent podcast interview, Sally Abed, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and member of Standing Together, an organization working for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, explained, “Our lives are... unbelievably intertwined.” She argued that Jewish-Palestinian solidarity can create a space to contain and hold both experiences, including the shared pain and shared fate, together, while serving as “the worst enemy for Hamas and for the [current] Israeli government.”

Historians are well-positioned to help create such a space.

One way to do so is to apply the approach known as global history to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Global history emphasizes connections,
comparisons, and transformations beyond the artificial boundaries of individual cultures, nations, and empires and gives room to those like Abed with a vision of peace and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Deciding which historical framework to apply is not just an academic exercise—particularly in this conflict, where another approach, known as settler colonialism, has become a popular way of analyzing current events. A settler colonialism lens focuses on the process by which foreign populations, often from Europe, dispossess native people of their land and eliminate or erase their cultures and societies in order to erect new colonial societies. Thus, it tends to define the current conflict in terms of oppressive Jewish colonizers set against indigenous Palestinian victims. But despite its increasing popularity among academics and activists, it cannot fully explain the complex history of the region. Using a variety of methods and techniques from global history, however, makes it possible to capture the dynamic and multi-dimensional historical relationship between the two peoples and provides a foundation on which they can build a reconciliatory bridge.

This approach reveals that late 19th- and 20th-century global forces set the two sides on a collision course. It also helps observers see that the last 100 years, which have been marked by conflicts between the two peoples, are a historical divergence from a much longer period of coexistence and conviviality.

According to the settler colonialism paradigm, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European Zionists, with the help of the British, invaded and occupied the land of the indigenous Palestinians. Since then, Israelis, with the backing of another imperial power, the U.S., have sought to colonize, eliminate, and deny statehood to the Palestinians.

This framing contains important implications for resolving the conflict and insights, including that some of Israel’s founders came from Europe with a colonial mindset. Their land purchases from the Ottomans and absentee Arab landlords in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel resulted in what Palestinians call the Nakba (catastrophe), the dispossession and displacement of roughly 750,000 people from their
homes and villages. The settler colonial model also directs much needed attention to the widespread suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, and even to mistreatment of Palestinian citizens within Israel, although they have greater legal rights and social security than Palestinians in those territories.

Read More: Finding Common Ground Between Israelis and Palestinians

Yet, as historian Sebastian Conrad notes, “privileging the colonizer/colonized divide as the fundamental explanatory framework imposes a binary logic that for all its insights ultimately remains restrictive. It lacks the capacity to take account of a complex globalizing world.” It also misses the much longer relational history of Jews, Muslims, Christians, and others in Israel-Palestine and the broader Islamic world, where Jews typically enjoyed greater toleration and safety than their counterparts in Christian Europe.

Jews were expelled multiple times from parts of what is now Israel between the eighth century BCE and the first century CE, as well as being banned by the Romans in the second century CE. Yet, Jews remained in the Galilee and the northern portions of Israel, and there has been a consistent Jewish presence since those times. Many of those who were exiled also remained in the region including North Africa, modern-day Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.

Under the rule of Islamic states and empires between the 7th and 20th centuries, Jews along with other minorities, such as the Greeks and Armenians, thrived in maritime commerce throughout the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean. Evidence from the Cairo Geniza, a cache of letters, legal documents, and accounts, preserved in a medieval Egyptian synagogue, documents Jewish life with many centuries of inter-denominational commercial activity and partnerships from Spain to India, including in Jerusalem and Ramle between the 9th and 12th centuries.

In the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries, tens of thousands of Jews (and many more Muslims) from the Catholic Iberian Peninsula found refuge in North Africa and the Ottoman empire. The Iberian Jews (known as Sephardim) joined already existing Jewish communities in cities such as Cairo, Constantinople,
Damascus, Salonica, Safed, and Jerusalem. There, like Christians, they were a protected minority as “people of the book,” although they were specially taxed, considered second-class citizens, and subject to periodic attacks. Many flourished despite these challenges and lived peacefully with their neighbors.

In Ottoman Jerusalem, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim families lived in close proximity, often sharing courtyards. Over centuries, people from all three faiths forged ties in their daily lives through business partnerships, visits on religious holidays, performing music at each other’s weddings, and sharing common cultural beliefs, including fear of the evil eye.

Including these centuries of history in the story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict provides a whole new perspective. It reveals how it was late-19th- and 20th-century political ideologies, forces, and structures, to which both Jews and Palestinians were subject, which created a historical rupture and the conditions for violent conflict.

While colonialism was a factor, other global developments—the spread of ethnic nationalism, the disintegration of Eurasian empires coupled with the expansion of the British and French empires, and the widespread persecution of ethnic and religious minorities—were also of great importance. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, exclusionary nationalism was on the rise, not only in states such as France and Germany but also within the borders of the Hapsburg, Ottoman, Romanov, and Qing empires. A variety of imperial subjects, such as the Armenians, Jews, Albanians, Greeks, and Arabs developed their own forms of nationalism, seeking support for their political aspirations not only from within the empires where they resided but also from outside powers. Crucially, in an attempt to maintain control, these host empires and states manipulated tensions and stoked violence among their subjects. The results were catastrophic, culminating in decades of state-sponsored (or encouraged) genocide, ethnic cleansing, and population transfers across much of Europe and Asia.

These global forces swept up Jews and Palestinians, producing a new more chaotic and violent chapter in their own intertwined history.
Within the Ottoman empire, divisions between the two communities also hardened as a result of the Tanzimat, a series of 19th-century reforms, which unintentionally spawned new modes of allegiance and proto-nationalisms among different minority groups within the empire.

Tensions were also exacerbated by the arrival in Palestine of 70,000 Jews between 1881 and 1914, who sought refuge from ethnic violence, religious persecution, and the bleak economic conditions of Eastern Europe. While some harbored nationalist aspirations, even they could not have foreseen the collapse of the Ottoman empire. The diverse Jewish community in Palestine, including the recent arrivals, came to accept living under Ottoman rule. Many embraced Ottomanism — some of their children even fought in the Ottoman military. It was, as Louis Fishman writes, the Ottoman world that united Jews and Palestinians as citizens “yet divided them over their future shared homeland,” as they each vied for hegemony in a shifting political landscape.

This world was further altered when the British and French divvied up Ottoman lands at the end of World War One. For the British, gaining newfound territory while being financially and logistically over stretched, meant trying to run the newest parts of their empire—including the Palestine mandate—informally and on the cheap. The change in imperial rule also erased the Jews’ and Palestinians’ common Ottoman citizenship.

**Read More:** How the Yom Kippur War Changed Israel

Whether or not British imperial agents favored one side or the other, both Jews and Palestinians shared the 20th-century postcolonial experience of advocating and fighting for the interests of their nascent national communities in an unstable imperial context. Because British strategic goals in the region were always paramount, both Palestinians and Jews found their colonial rulers unreliable and duplicitous at times.

Amid the administrative inconsistencies and influx of Jewish refugees from Europe, for example, Palestinians resisted with organized strikes, riots, and violent clashes in the 1920s and 1930s. During the early 1940s, by contrast, Jewish militants undertook bombing campaigns and assassinations of British
personnel in response to restrictions on Jewish immigration as Jews were attempting to escape Nazi Europe.

British rule ultimately proved unworkable. In Nov. 1947, the U.N. passed a resolution partitioning the Palestine-mandate into two states, one Jewish, and one Palestinian. The British, however, relinquished the Mandate in May 1948 without ever implementing the partition, leaving behind a post-imperial quagmire amid a quickly hardening Cold War landscape.

The result was war between the newly declared Israeli and neighboring Arab states, alongside the stateless Palestinians, resulting in the displacement, dispossession, and expulsion of roughly 750,000 Palestinians. The conflict also led to a dramatic deterioration of conditions for Jews in North Africa and the Middle East. Over half a million Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Syria gave up their homes and property to seek refuge from economic and religious persecution in the new Jewish state. Because of this mass migration, more than half of Israel’s current population has African and Middle Eastern heritage.

Ultimately, the Holocaust, Nakba, and flight of the Mizrahi Jews cannot be understood separately. They are parts of a shared catastrophe, parts of the interconnected global history of Jews and Palestinians.

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Using the tools of global history to think through the Israel-Palestine conflict does not mean shying “away from difficult conversations about the occupation, bloodshed and inequality,” as critics of Standing Together have accused the group of doing. But it is an approach premised on the reality articulated by Alon-Lee Green, another of the organization’s leaders: “We have only one home... She’s Palestinian and I’m Jewish, but the only home we both have is the same home.”

Despite the current dominance of the right-wing, expansionist coalition in Israeli politics and the havoc being wrought in Gaza and the West Bank, it is still possible “to shift public opinion, and create a shared, embodied struggle for liberation between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis.” Good history can play a role by showing that nothing is inevitable, and reminding the world of the common humanity and intertwined pasts of both peoples.

The toolbox of global history dares us to imagine a way out of this entangled tragedy and a path forward into a shared future.

Jessica Hanser is an associate professor of history at the University of British Columbia and a lecturer at the University of Copenhagen. She is the author of Mr. Smith Goes to China: Three Scots in the Making of Britain’s Global Empire.

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An Open Letter To My Friends Who Signed “Philosophy for Palestine”

The Hannah Arendt Center  ·  Follow
Published in Amor Mundi  ·  9 min read  ·  Nov 4, 2023

Seyla Benhabib
Dear Friends, Dear Colleagues:

These are dark times as multiple crises are erupting around the world while talk of a global conflagration is heard in many circles. These are also times that try human relationships, friendships, and alliances. I have read many of you; taught many of you; have been advisor to some of you and have fought together with you for the rights of women in our universities; for gender-sex equality; for the rights of Muslim students to wear the hijab, for the rights of refugees and the stateless among many other battles. But I do not endorse this letter and many of the views expressed in it.

I owe it to my friends and to myself to get our ideas clear. Let me first say that ever since I was a student activist in Istanbul, Turkey in the late 1960’s, I have supported the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination,
and as I have reflected over the Israeli-Palestinian and also the Arab-Israeli conflict — and the two are not the same — over the last half century, I have advocated sometimes a binational state; sometimes one state, sometimes a federated structure.

My objection to your letter is that it sees the conflict in Israel-Palestine through the lens of “settler-colonialism” alone, and elevates Hamas’s atrocities of October 7, 2023 to an act of legitimate resistance against an occupying force. By construing the Israel-Palestine conflict through the lens of settler-colonialism, you elide the historical evolution of both peoples. Zionism is not a form of racism, though the actions and institutions of the State of Israel towards the Palestinian people of the occupied West Bank, the refugee camps and, of course, Gaza, are discriminatory on the basis of nationality, not color, and reflect the continuing state of emergency that exists between Israel and its neighbors.

Historically, many Israeli leaders, including none other than Ben Gurion himself, had pleaded for the return of the territories Israel conquered in 1967 because they feared that it would change the democratic and Jewish character of the state. At the time there was no Palestinian Authority, but diverse Palestinian liberation movements emerged in the course of the 1970’s such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led by George Habash, and the Palestine Liberation organization, led by Yasser Arafat. Palestinian nationalism, just like many other nationalisms, including Zionism, emerged in the crucible of the struggle for recognition by its opponents. Israeli and Palestinian nationalisms mirror each other, and at the end of the day they have to live cheek by jowl and share the territory with one another.
There is no sense of history in your statement nor any sense of the tragedies that befell these peoples, and the many missed moments when another future seemed possible. Although you refer to “the conditions that produce violence,” you do not mention that Yitzhak Rabin was killed by a Jewish extremist and Anwar Sadat, after his visit to Israel, was killed by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the ideological progenitor of Hamas. You write: “the people of Gaza have urged allies worldwide to exert pressure on their governments to demand an immediate ceasefire. But they have been clear that this should — this must — be the beginning and not the end of collective action for liberation.” In endorsing these demands, you also endorse Hamas’s position as the supposed vanguard of the Palestinian “liberation struggle.” This is a colossal mistake. Hamas is a nihilistic organization which treats the civilian population of Gaza as its hostage. The leader of the organization, Ismail Hanniye, sits in a luxury hotel in Qatar, while children on the streets of Gaza die. Yes, as Amnesty International has said, “Gaza is the largest open-air prison in the world,” but this is also due to the fact that Hamas is an exterminationist organization, whose Charter endorses the destruction of the State of Israel. You also implicitly seem to support this when you write that, “If there is to be justice and peace, the siege of Gaza must be lifted; the occupation must end, and the rights must be respected of all people currently living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, as well as those of Palestinian refugees in exile.” Amen to that! but do you see Hamas a political organization dedicated to “respecting the rights of all people currently living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean”? This defies history and logic. Hamas is dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel; I do not support that. Do you? What moral or political logic is guiding your reasoning here?

The attacks of October 7, 2023 are not “just one salvo in an ongoing war between an occupying state and the people it occupies, or as an occupied
people exercising a right to resist violent and illegal occupation, something anticipated by international humanitarian law in the Second Geneva Protocol,” as a letter signed by some Columbia and Barnard colleagues states. (Columbia Faculty Letter: Grave Concerns About the Well-Being of Our Students (google.com).) They are a turning point not only for the Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere, but also in the history of the Palestinian people. The murder of 1300 Israeli Jews, the wounding of 3000 others, the devastation of kibbutzim and towns and the taking hostage of over 200 people, have created a deep wound in the psyche of many Jews around the world; only compounded by the sense that Israel has lost in the world of public opinion. And it has: anti-Semitism has raised its ugly head from Paris to Dagestan, from Cornell to Berlin. Yes, of course the critique of Israel and Zionism is not anti-Semitism. Left Jewish groups for peace were the first to say that many years ago around the time of the Oslo accords in the late 1980’s and they bear the scars of these struggles against the Israeli establishment.

October 7, 2023 is not just a turning point for Israel and the Jewish diaspora; it must be a turning point for the Palestinian struggle. The Palestinian people must free themselves of the scourge of Hamas. The acts of violence engaged in on October 7, 2023 — the desecration and mutilation of bodies; the killing of children and babies; the burning alive of young people at a music festival; rape and ritual murder and kidnappings — are not only war crimes as well as crimes against humanity; they also reveal that Islamic Jihadi ideology, which revels in the pornography of violence, has overtaken the movement. The struggle for Palestine and the killing of Jewish people is now seen as a jihad. The President of Turkey, never to miss a moment to raise the Islamicist flag when it suits him to cover his authoritarian politics at home, called Hamas “mujehadeen”- fighters for Jihad, during the 100th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 2023. The
Palestinian people have to fight against this destructive ideology that is now overtaking their movement.

Yes, it is not only Hamas which has committed war crimes; Israel is in the process of doing so in Gaza as well. The “disproportional” violence and destruction of the civilian population under conditions of hostility is a war crime. The children of Gaza have become “collateral damage,” in the cold language of rules of armed engagement, and Israel must be condemned for not doing all it can to avoid bombing the civil population of Gaza which apparently now has exceeded 9000. But we cannot neglect the utter nihilism and cynicism of Hamas in placing their weapons and headquarters under hospitals and mosques, which they know full well, if and when they are hit by Israel, will cause world-wide outrage.

Nonetheless, I endorse the call for an end to this cruel cycle of violence, almost biblical and apocalyptic in its ferocity, and also call for a cease-fire in Gaza. The cease-fire must be accompanied by the immediate evacuation of the wounded, the elderly and the young from Gaza. There must not be a second Nakba. Neighboring countries as well as communities in the West Bank as well as Jordan and Egypt, and other countries, must volunteer to receive Palestinian refugees who wish to escape conditions of hostility. But at the end of the day, a Palestinian state must be established. There must be an exchange of prisoners for hostages. Israel is holding thousands of Palestinians in its prisons; some must be released in accordance with conditions conforming to international law in return for hostages.

The Abraham Accords, which neglected the Palestinians, must incorporate them as well and lead towards a final recognition of the borders of the State of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and parts of Gaza. The fact that there is no territorial contiguity between Gaza
and the rest of the Palestinian territories will need to be dealt with through some arrangements, just as the close to 500,000 Israeli settlers will need to be withdrawn from the occupied territories. And this may result in a civil war in Israel.

There are two real dangers at the present which will affect any peaceful resolution of this conflict for the next half century: Hamas’s victory in the eyes of the world, and the mobilization of world public opinion against Israel, also mean that members of the Palestinian Authority, and other Palestinian who accept co-existence with Israel, have been sidelined. Young Palestinians on the West Bank who are impressed by Hamas, may start flocking to it. Reasonable and honorable voices among the Palestinians who choose peaceful coexistence, such as the philosopher, Sari Nusseibeh, ex-President of the University of Al-Quds, and Mustafa Baghrouti, whose brother Marwan Baghrouti, was one of the heroes of the Oslo accords and who sits in Israeli prison (who knows on what kind of charges), may be completely silenced now. The international community, and above all, the United States, must stop the marginalization of alternative Palestinian leaderships.

Another danger, and here I join those who accuse Israel's colonial-settler policies in the occupied territories, are the efforts of right-wing Israeli parties; of the governing Likud; of the fascist, Itmar Ben Gwir, who is the so-called Minister of National Security; of Bezalel Smotrich, the Finance Minister, and others to create “facts on the ground” by dispossessing, beating, and torturing Palestinians on the West Bank. They intend nothing other than the “ethnic cleansing” of Judea and Samaria- the Biblical names of the land of Israel. They are the legatees of a long line of Judeo-fascism, which none other than Albert Einstein, joined by Hannah Arendt and Sidney Hook, denounced in their Open Letter to the NY Times on December 2, 1948,
Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our times is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the “Freedom Party” (Tnuat HaHerut), a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was formed out of the membership and following of the former Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization in Palestine....

A shocking example was their behavior in the Arab village of Deir Yassin. This village, off the main roads and surrounded by Jewish lands, had taken no part in the war, and had even fought off Arab bands who wanted to use the village as their base. On April 9 (THE NEW YORK TIMES), terrorist bands attacked this peaceful village, which was not a military objective in the fighting, killed most of its inhabitants — 240 men, women, and children — and kept a few of them alive to parade as captives through the streets of Jerusalem.

Today the legatees of this party and movement — Likud was established by Menachem Begin — are in power in Israel and they have brought upon Israel the worst disaster since the Holocaust. The Jewish community in the diaspora must have the courage to speak these truths and intervene in this cycle of violence before the region explodes further in spasms of Messianic violence on both sides.

I am not confident that any of what I believe must happen will come to pass in the near future. But as philosophers we need to get our ideas clear. As Kant said in 1795, although the idea of “Perpetual peace” among nations may resemble the picture that a Dutch Innkeeper placed on his window of a graveyard, playing on the German word, “ewig,” which can mean both
eternal and perpetual, we have no choice but to hope that through our principles we can change the world as well.
Israeli academics say their universities are ‘best chance’ for peace

The Canadian Press
May 3, 2024 6:30 AM
Updated May 3, 2024 8:23 AM

Among the demands of pro Palestinian activists, many of whom have set up protest encampments on university campuses in Canada and the United States, is for Israeli universities to be isolated. Pro Palestinian activists at their encampment on the McGill University campus in Montreal, Wednesday, May 1, 2024. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Ryan Remiorz

One of the demands of pro-Palestinian activists who have set up protest encampments on university campuses in Canada and the United States is a severing of ties with Israeli universities.

Tel Aviv University and other research institutions in Israel are accused of being accomplices in that country’s war in Gaza and its occupation of Palestinian territories. But some prominent Israeli
academics argue their universities are also home to leading voices for peace and have been at the forefront of the internal protest movement against the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

“Academics in Israel are striving for peace — maybe more than any other part of the Israel community,” Prof. Ran Barkai, who teaches prehistoric archeology at Tel Aviv University, said in an interview Wednesday from Israel.

Israeli universities should be empowered, he added, because they are home to the major forces pushing for reconciliation with Palestinians.

“Good relations should be kept with them because they are the centre of sanity of Israel — if sanity can be reached it’s through people in universities ... decreasing relations with Israel universities would only harm chances for peace.”

To the McGill and Concordia University branches of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, which are among the organizers of an encampment erected Saturday on the McGill campus, Israeli universities are complicit in the war and there is nothing to be gained through dialogue with them. They say the encampment will remain until their schools “cut all academic ties with Israeli institutions.”

Leo Corry, president of The Open University of Israel, is clear about the responsibility of academics in his country with regard to the conflict with the Palestinians. Professors, he said, like most other Israeli citizens, pay taxes and take part in the military — the state requires male citizens over 18 to serve in the defence forces for at least 32 months and women for at least 24 months.

“In a way we are all part of what happens here,” Corry said in an interview from the Tel Aviv area. “Part of the problem that I and others have is the way (the conflict) is presented as black and white, and I think that’s pernicious and misleading and problematic.”
Israeli scientists, he said, and other academics have taken part in producing some of Israel’s defence weapons, like the Iron Dome, which was credited with helping to prevent serious damage or casualties from an unprecedented attack in April by Iran involving hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles.

“Fortunately for us we have that. Imagine what would have happened if we hadn’t,” Corry said.

“We live in a very difficult part of the world. And if you are at McGill or any other place in the United States or Canada, you can shout or scream, but you’re not going to come to defend us when we need it, right? So we need to defend ourselves — but that doesn’t mean that whatever the army does, what the government or certain parts of society supports, is considered by me to be the correct thing to do.”

If Canadian scholars cut ties with Israeli universities, Barkai said, then academics in Canada lose the ability to influence Israeli intellectuals. International researchers can gain from the insight and innovation in Israel, but “these connections work both ways,” he said.

Israeli academics, he added, learn a lot from their international colleagues. “They get a better perspective of how we are seen in the world. It makes us understand how we should behave, what we should do better.”

Before Oct. 7, when Hamas launched a deadly attack on southern Israel, the country was wracked for months by civil unrest against Netanyahu and his ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox political allies, who were pressing ahead with plans to pass contentious changes to Israel’s judicial system.

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'I Won't Work With You. You're Committing Genocide': Israeli Academia Faces an Unprecedented Global Boycott

Canceled invitations to conferences, a freeze on hiring Israelis at overseas institutions, rejection of scientific articles on political grounds, disruption of lectures abroad – Israeli scholars from various disciplines paint a painful picture of the foreign boycott that has afflicted them since the war broke out in Gaza

Or Kashti
Apr 12, 2024

In February, Gilad Hirschberger received an invitation to be the keynote speaker at a conference to be held this October by a Norwegian organization that deals with collective trauma. The invitation, from an Oslo-based research center, came in the wake of studies conducted by Prof. Hirschberger – a social psychologist at Reichman University, in Herzliya – including one on the long-term effects of the Holocaust.

"Victim and perpetrator perspectives on a group level seem very
relevant to our work," one of the organizers wrote. "We are of course aware of the tragedies and the ongoing conflict in your part of the world, which also has global impact. We would of course be interested to hear your thoughts on how this might influence your views on collective trauma today."

In the days that followed, a series of messages were exchanged between the Norwegian psychologist and Hirschberger, who also serves as vice dean of Reichman's Baruch Ivcher School of Psychology, about his lecture. "Polarization between extremes is among the consequences of terror and war," wrote his Norwegian contact person. "We would be grateful if you would be willing to discuss shortly this aspect of our conference."

Hirschberger replied that he intended to present "the effects of collective trauma in our region on both Israelis and Palestinians."

However, a very different message arrived the next day. "I regret to inform you that we have to withdraw our invitation. This decision has been taken by the organizing committee for the conference. The argument is to avoid collaboration with representatives of countries involved in ongoing warfare," the Norwegian wrote, not concealing his own criticism of the decision.

Hirschberger was taken aback. "I have been active in the contentious field of political psychology for many years, but never have I encountered such a direct, blunt response," he says. "I was rejected because I am an Israeli." His response: "To treat an individual negatively because of their group membership is the essence of prejudice. If psychologists can't contain their prejudice, and if even clinical psychologists express such intolerance, what hope does the rest of the world have?"
Even ignoring, for a moment, the response of his Norwegian counterparts, it's clear to him who is going to pay the price. "Israeli academia is liable to find itself in a new situation regarding participation in conferences, fundraising for research or publication of articles," he says. "We are totally dependent on international connections. Collaboration with us will become increasingly difficult, it will be considered something beyond the pale."

Is Israeli academia about to enter a whole new phase? All signs are that it already has. In the past few weeks, Haaretz spoke with more than 60 Israeli scholars from a wide range of disciplines and academic institutions, from young scientists and university presidents about their experiences with colleagues abroad since the war broke out in the Gaza Strip after Hamas' massacre on October 7.

They recounted dozens of incidents: cancellation of invitations to conferences, a freeze on their appointments in foreign institutions, rejection of scientific articles on political grounds, disruption of lectures abroad, cessation of collaborative efforts with colleagues abroad, refusal by such colleagues to take part in the promotion process their Israeli counterparts must undergo at local institutions, and even a sweeping boycott of local colleges and universities. The following examples, all from recent months and backed up by documents and emails, are being made public here for the first time. The plethora of events leaves no room for doubt: Israel is feeling the brunt of an unprecedented academic boycott, which is only gathering momentum.

Similar conclusions were evident in a survey conducted in January by the Israel Young Academy, an organization of young...
scholars that serves as an incubator for ideas and projects, which was founded in 2012 by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In that survey – of 1,000 senior faculty members at all of Israel's institutions of higher learning – one-third of the respondents reported a significant slump in their ties with counterparts abroad.

Some provided details: "A colleague in Europe informed me that she needs to remove the name of one of my former students from an article they co-authored, because her university is against any collaboration with Israel"; "My research partner requested that we not submit joint requests for grants to research foundations"; "A lab director with whom I have worked for many years said he finds it difficult to work with Israelis"; "A colleague in a European country received threats because he was collaborating with Israel," and so on and so forth.

These comments were provided anonymously by the respondents and are in keeping with dozens of testimonies obtained by Haaretz. Together they create a picture of a frightening blow being dealt to Israeli academia, which is already being felt on the ground and is likely, primarily, affecting young scholars setting out on their careers. "People have severed ties with us – they have stopped responding to emails and have simply disappeared," says Prof. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, a sociologist from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Similar impressions have been expressed by many academic staff members.

"A discourse of fear around maintaining contacts with Israelis is emerging," relates R., a young Israeli who works in a lab in the field of the exact sciences at an elite university in England. His story is especially enlightening for understanding how Israeli
academics like him are currently being received abroad.

In recent months, R. had suggested to the directors of his lab that they collaborate with universities in Israel. His proposal was rejected on the grounds that it is difficult to work with an institution located in a war zone if doing so essentially "benefits" only one side of the conflict. R. did not back down. He suggested allowing Israeli students to participate in a project involving remote learning. That attempt failed, as well. "The war is complicating things," he was told, and "no one wants to take a risk." The lab had already been "burned" in a similar case not long before, the directors explained, when sanctions were imposed on continuing associations with Russian researchers with whom they had been working.

"The lab's directors even asked me to remove the fact that I am from Israel from my profile on the university's website," R. says. "I consented. Not because I was asked to, but because I realized that it was in fact to my benefit."

Back in Israel," he adds, "people find it hard to understand this, but we are two minutes away from getting the same treatment as Putin's Russia.

D. fights back tears. A young lecturer in the social sciences, she sees her career about to go down the drain. Like other academics, she chose to be interviewed anonymously here for fear that having her name published would burn her few remaining professional bridges. Some interviewees were concerned that using their names would hurt colleagues abroad or encourage the boycotters. Others were simply afraid.

"I invested almost 20 years in studies and in gradually progressing in my field. But now the ability to continue with my
work is very limited," she says, adding that she feels pressure from multiple directions. "I am taking part in a large international project in Europe, together with other researchers from a number of countries," she relates. "A few weeks ago, they asked me not to publish our joint studies on my website: The ties between us are harmful to them."

When she suggested joining a research workshop with her colleagues, the response was an unequivocal refusal. "Ethical considerations" do not permit any connection with an academic in Israel, she was told. "Ties with an Israeli researcher have become something considered to be illegitimate," she sums up. "My future is limited."

It once seemed as if the social sciences and humanities are more vulnerable to political struggles. Indeed, such departments in Israel were familiar with the impact of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement long before October 7. However, the cessation of collaboration – whether in conducting research, co-authoring articles or in other areas – is now being seen as a widespread phenomenon in all fields.

A few months ago, Nir Davidson, a physics professor at the Weizmann Institute of Science, suggested to an Italian colleague that they try together to request a grant from a competitive research foundation. "Because of the atrocities your country is perpetrating against innocent civilians, thousands of professors and researchers have signed a petition calling for all research collaboration to be blocked," the colleague replied, noting that he "fondly recalls" a visit he made to Israel in 2020, but adding, "I'm afraid that what your country has done and is continuing to do will never be forgotten or forgiven."
About a month ago, a scientist from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev was ejected from an international group that submits research proposals to the European Union in the realm of environmental studies. The explanation he was given by one of his colleagues was, "I'm really sorry, but I'm going to have to not select Israel as a partner for the project. In fact, some partners do not wish to be involved in the project if Israel is a partner, particularly given the current political context. I am truly sorry, and I hope that we will have the opportunity to work together on another research project. Thank you for your understanding and I wish you all the best for the future."

Another incident was cited by Ravit Alfandari, from the University of Haifa's School of Social Work. She worked for over a year with a researcher from Northern Ireland on a large-scale study about domestic violence, and initially their collaborative effort continued after the war in Gaza broke out. "I understand you," the Irish colleague told her, in one of their conversations. "I too know what it's like to live under a threat." But then, in November, just before they submitted a jointly written article to a highly regarded journal, he informed her that he had signed a petition calling for an academic boycott of Israel.

"He was decisive," Dr. Alfandari recalls. "He said, 'I hold you in great esteem, but I don't intend to work with you ever again. It's not a temporary thing. You are committing genocide in Gaza.'"

In December, a literary scholar at Belgium's KU Leuven University terminated a joint project with a scholar from the Hebrew University. "Our students are 'very vocal' on this subject," the scholar wrote, explaining that someone had written on exam forms that were distributed in class, 'Leuven – stop supporting genocide.'" In another case, an attempt by a
Hebrew University professor in the social sciences to find an academic institution in Italy that would take part in teaching a joint course ended in disappointment.

"I got a punch in the stomach from my longtime colleagues," the Israeli scholar says. "There was a lot of squirming. On the one hand, they didn't say 'no' to my face; on the other hand, it was actually 'no' with an exclamation mark."

Similarly, Prof. Einat Metzl, head of the arts therapy program at Bar-Ilan University, was slated to visit a university in Los Angeles within the framework of leading a joint training program in her field, but the visit was canceled when three students objected to inviting a lecturer from Israel.

A professor at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology told Haaretz about a student exchange program with a university in Denmark that was called off. Discussions about the program, which had reached an advanced stage in the months preceding the war, came to a halt in November. "The atmosphere changed, and was against us," the professor says. "My counterpart said that it would be best to suspend the project. My impression was that he was afraid of his colleagues."

The boycott of Israeli academia has also seeped into the field of business administration. A joint program in that field with an elite university in a large Western country was canceled a few weeks ago. Concern over anticipated anti-Israel demonstrations at the school was the off-the-record explanation.

Yet there are also cases of a reverse trend – of Israeli academics who have themselves decided to break their ties. "I had good relations for many years with the editor of a journal," notes Prof. Michal Frenkel, from Hebrew University's Department of..."
Already on October 7 he complained about 'unbalanced' coverage in the world media. A few days later, he signed a letter calling for a boycott of Israel. He didn't even wait until we entered Gaza. I resigned from the journal's academic council. I couldn't work with a person like that.

* * *

About a month ago, Dan Mamlok, from the School of Education at Tel Aviv University, arrived in Montreal to deliver a lecture at a research center there. He was confronted by dozens of pro-Palestinian demonstrators, most of them from the city's McGill University, who blocked the entry of the attendees. "It was surprising and ironic to discover demonstrators against a lecture that dealt with education for tolerance in a polarized society," he relates. "I came as a researcher of education – not as a representative of the Israeli government.

"After a certain amount of effort," notes Dr. Mamlok, who managed to get into the building and deliver the talk before a small audience, "the security guards succeeded in getting a few people in through the building's cellar. Outside a demonstration took place, which was very audible in the room. In the end, three security men escorted me, and then I was driven to the hotel in a police car." In light of stories like these, he says, he knows of many academics "who are considering canceling lectures [abroad], and some who have already done so."

Last week, Prof. Adam Lefstein, who heads the Seymour Fox School of Education at Hebrew University, organized a meeting for colleagues in his department in advance of their trips to conferences overseas. About 15 people attended the event, at
which proposals for coping with possible disruptions were discussed.

One suggestion was to begin by talking about the war, including about criticism of it, "but also to say that we are here to talk about research," Lefstein says. Another idea was "to display a presence" by attending one another's sessions. "I don't think one should be dragged into a shouting match," Lefstein avers, "but sometimes it's necessary to give lecturers the feeling that they are not alone."

Indeed, the specter of possible demonstrations against Israeli academics overseas has had a chilling effect. Prof. Netta Barak-Koren, from Hebrew University's law school, currently on a sabbatical in the United States, was appointed to help colleagues in Jerusalem prepare for boycott-related scenarios. A few weeks ago, she says she organized a conference at a leading U.S. university that was only authorized following consultations with a long and unusual series of people – something she had already experienced elsewhere in recent months.

"Suddenly universities are discussing the possibility of holding a conference in less prominent venues, or even after the end of the academic year, in order to avoid demonstrations. Our partners were very committed to organizing the [recent] event and holding it," she says, but she says she is not sure that has been true in other cases.

To avert debacles, organizers of conferences abroad are canceling the participation of Israeli scholars in advance, but not the events themselves. A., who is in the field of the social sciences, was invited last summer by a European colleague to deliver a lecture at a local university later this year. "After
October 7, she immediately took an interest in my well-being and expressed concern and sympathy," she explains. About a month ago, the two started to plan the subject of the lecture – but then she was notified it had been canceled. It's better to postpone the event indefinitely, because of the war in Gaza and the criticism it's provoking among students, A. was told.

Many academics note a significant decline in the number of scientific conferences they've attended in the last half year. There are a number of reasons for this, ranging from the problem of finding flights after the war broke out, to changes related to the timing and duration of the semesters, to difficulties in integrating socially in gatherings abroad at a time like this. At a conference of a social sciences association last November in North America, for example, most of the participants attached a sticker stating "Stop the Genocide in Gaza" to their name tags. At an international education gathering in Miami, in early March, a session focusing on "Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza" was held under the aegis of the organization's president.

Among all these examples, one that stands out is a scientific conference of the Society for Free Radical Research International, scheduled to be held in Istanbul in June. But already in early February, the heads of the European branch of the society informed Moran Benhar, of the Technion's Faculty of Medicine, that due to the war in Gaza, the government of Turkey had decided to bar Israeli scientists from taking part in the event, and nothing could be done about it.

Prof. Benhar: "They said that it was really unpleasant, but that the situation had been forced on them. I said that I didn't think it was reasonable. Just as it was untenable for a country that had
undertaken to host the Olympic Games to boycott another country, it was unacceptable for Turkey to decide who would attend an international conference being held on its soil." In their conversation, the European heads of the organization repeated that they didn't want to get into "political issues," as that would create "a problematic precedent." Benhar's response was that their consent to bow to Turkey's boycott policy was a far more dangerous precedent.

After consulting with various colleagues, Benhar contacted a leading Jewish scientist at Harvard, who was due to receive a research prize at the Istanbul event. Within a short time, the scientist informed the organizers that he would not attend a conference that boycotted Israeli researchers. A few days later, the society's directors announced that all the restrictions had been lifted.

"I'm certain that the disconnect between Israel and other countries will happen in many areas," says A., the researcher whose lecture was canceled in Europe. "We are only at the beginning of the road. I think people aren't aware of the price we are paying and will continue to pay. Maybe we'll wake up when we aren't invited to the Olympic Games."

Similar concerns are voiced by Prof. Yuval Feldman from Bar-Ilan's school. "The process of a quite prestigious appointment abroad for myself was suspended this week because 'this is not the most appropriate time,'" Feldman, who preferred not to be interviewed here, tweeted on X, on March 25. "I wonder whether we are encountering a new reality abroad that will not end even if the situation in Israel improves – a kind of genie that we won't be able to put back into the bottle."
"I think we are a little like the canary in the mine," Eran Toch, from Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Engineering, tweeted back. "The connection with the world is critical for Israel. We are not Russia. And academia stands on that front lines against the world." Prof. Toch added that the process "will lead to a [wider] boycott of Israeli products, and that's something everyone must take into account."

Israeli academics could perhaps have anticipated the problems they're having during the war with collaborations with colleagues abroad and with conferences and lectures overseas. But what they did not expect was that publication of articles in academic journals – effectively, the bread and butter of the world of research – would also be affected. The processes of initial acceptance, peer review and publication of such articles are supposed to be neutral, professional and unbiased. But this is no longer always the case, as Israeli researchers are realizing.

In November, Liat Ayalon, from Bar-Ilan's School of Social Work, submitted a short article to an academic journal where she had published in the past. The article dealt with the war's impact on the situation of Israel's elderly community. Shortly afterward, the editor, with whom she had worked for some two decades, called and asked her to withdraw the article. "He said that he could not send it out for peer review," Prof. Ayalon relates. "He explained that the feelings in the United States against Israel were so strong that he was afraid that publishing the article would be detrimental to the journal."

It was not a pleasant conversation: "He told me, 'You know that I support you [Israel] and I've been to Israel four times, but I can't publish it at this time.'" She was so astounded that she didn't even argue with him at first. "I said, 'Fine, if that's what you
want. I accept your opinion."

A few days later, however, she had a change of heart and decided to write him.

"I do think this is a slippery slope," Ayalon wrote. "Right now the political sentiment does not allow to publish papers on older Israelis, but soon enough, it will be against having Israel as an affiliation (I am sure this is the case in some places already) and thereafter, it will be having a Jewish last name. I can't imagine an American journal not publishing a paper on the effects of 9/11 on older people because of public sentiment, and although I don't think that we should or could be comparing levels of suffering, the magnitude of Oct. 7 was 10 times greater given the size of the population.

"Hence, I am just concluding by a) thanking you once again for being honest about this and b) saying that we should be careful because we (Israelis) are at the front, but unfortunately hatred and bigotry affect and will affect everyone."

The editor ultimately backed down – but Ayalon had already submitted the article elsewhere. It was accepted within 24 hours, perhaps because the second editor was an even warmer supporter of Israel. "It looks as though at the moment everything is political," she says.

Something similar happened to Prof. Rael Strous, director of the Mental Health Wing of Mayanei Hayeshua Medical Center, in Bnei Brak. Strous, a professor of psychiatry at Tel Aviv University's Sackler Faculty of Medicine, volunteered early on in the war to treat members of internally displaced families from the communities abutting Gaza who had been evacuated to Eilat. He wrote an article dealing with various aspects of his work
there, from administering treatment in a hotel lobby packed with people, to coping with requests of patients to tell the world about the trauma they had undergone. "I didn't think that was my task as a psychiatrist," he says. "I treat people."

Strous submitted his article in November to a prestigious European journal and received positive feedback from one of the editors. Three weeks later, however, he was informed that the article had been rejected.

"The author does not mention the larger context of the crisis they are discussing. By this I mean, they do not discuss the tens of thousands of Palestinians who continue to be killed, injured and psychologically traumatized in the current conflict," an anonymous referee wrote. "The silence on this matter ... is a form of epistemic injustice. That is, the author uses their position of privilege as a person with high–level academic training to erase the reality of Palestinian suffering from the narrative."

One example cited by the reviewer was that "the author does not consider the danger posed to Palestinians" by the people he treated, "in the context of considerable evidence that Israeli settlers often undertake vigilante attacks against Palestinians."

Strous responded to the reviewer: "My paper had absolutely nothing to do with 'Israeli settlers.' The hotels where we practiced were on the opposite side of the country. The evacuees were not from areas anywhere near what some refer to as occupied territories where "settlers" live." He added that this was proof that the "reviewer is clearly politically biased in his/her/their review."

The psychiatrist appealed, and complained that the rejection of
the article was "particularly unfair and disturbing." Within a short time, the journal's chief editor apologized and sent the article to a new peer reviewer. It was published his month. At the end of the abstract, a sentence was added saying that the paper was written from an Israeli viewpoint and the author acknowledges the suffering and psychiatric needs of Gazans. This was the journal's suggestion, Strous notes, and he agreed.

An Israeli professor who also serves as a deputy editor at a highly regarded journal of psychology got a similar reaction. She receives articles from researchers worldwide and sends them on for professional review. In mid-February she sent an article by an American psychologist to a Spanish scholar – who refused to peer-review it.

"I do not feel comfortable collaborating with nationals from a country which is committing war crimes," the referee wrote. "I hope that this state of affairs will soon come to an end, but, meanwhile, I want you to know that I will not be able to take any further request from you."

The Israeli editor was flabbergasted. She doesn't know either the author or the referee, and has no connection with the article itself.

"I was very sorry to receive your email and to discover that you are associating a review request with accusations of war crimes," she wrote back. "Needless to say, accepting or declining a review request is not a personal favor to any specific editor... Therefore, I find your response highly unprofessional and inappropriate."

In another incident, physicist Nir Davidson of the Weizmann Institute submitted an article to a journal together with a
scientist from Bar-Ilan. Along with professional comments, the referee wrote that he hopes "the situation in the strip of Gaza will become more 'human' as soon as possible. Mistakes have been made by both sides, but bombing is not the right way of addressing any problem (not even retaliation)." Davidson and his co-author wrote to the journal's chief editor, who apologized. The article is still under discussion.

Reactions like this, open and documentable, are unusual. In many cases, the situation local academics face remains ambiguous, but no less disturbing. In early February, a professor at an Israeli university was informed that his article had been accepted for publication in a journal dealing with the exact sciences. However, the paper – after being cleared for publication by the editor and scientific reviewers – became stuck at the ultimate stage when it came under the scrutiny of the publisher.

"No matter how many emails I sent, I didn't get any response," the author explains. "After a month, when I understood that no answer was forthcoming from the publisher, while other articles were being handled and getting published, I informed them that I was withdrawing the article. I submitted it to a different journal, and the whole process started over. I am a veteran member of the faculty. Neither I nor my colleagues can recall this sort of conduct."

Prof. Mark Last, from Ben-Gurion's Department of Software and Information Systems Engineering, submitted an article about artificial intelligence to an academic journal, together with two of his students, two months ago. "A few weeks went by and I got no response," Last relates. "We hoped that the reason was that the article had been sent for refereeing. Then, last month,
notification arrived that it had not met the requisite standards. I'd already received rejections of that sort, but usually a short explanation is added. I wrote to the chief editor asking for details. Within 24 hours, he wrote that he had reexamined the matter and had sent the article out for review. A few days ago the comments arrived; minor changes were needed."

"In November, I submitted an article to a journal that isn't considered to be very competitive," a social sciences professor tells Haaretz. "A week or so later I received a letter of rejection. They said they hadn't even sent it for peer review, and in one laconic sentence declared that it didn't meet their standards. I have almost 15 years' experience and that has never happened to me. I wrote a long letter to the editors about how peculiar their behavior was. I wrote that it's customary to at least add an explanation for the decision. I never received a reply."

"The most common way to discriminate against someone is to ignore them or provide a generic negative reply," explains legal scholar Barak-Koren, one of whose main areas of research is discrimination. "Explicit rejections on a discriminatory basis are extremely rare. It's easier, certainly via email, to ignore [people]. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the cases of explicit refusal we're seeing are only the tip of the iceberg of a broader phenomenon, in which researchers receive generalized refusals and are ignored because they are Israelis."

"I am writing to let you know that I have decided to step down from the Ph.D. committee [reviewing a student's thesis]," a foreign social sciences scholar wrote the Hebrew University recently. "Following the university's recent declaration of commitment to Zionism in the context of the war that is raging in Gaza, I feel I can no longer be associated with this institution."
I have enjoyed working with you all and it is with a heavy heart that I am making this decision."

The "commitment to Zionism" the professor cited was part of the fierce public condemnation the university issued against sharp remarks by Israeli-Palestinian Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, of its law faculty, against Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza. "As a proud Israeli, public, and Zionist institution," the university stated, it condemned her comments and suspended her, before reinstating her two weeks later.

The email from the foreign academic who asked to stop advising the Hebrew University doctoral student is only one example of an apparently growing phenomenon whereby scholars overseas no longer want to help prepare the next generation of lecturers and researchers at Israeli institutions: Sources at a few such institutions admit that they find it increasingly difficult to obtain the letters of evaluation from academics abroad that must be submitted in advance of discussions of staff promotions in Israel.

For the present, it looks as though the latter trend is particularly noticeable in the social sciences and the humanities: in sociology and anthropology, Middle Eastern studies and literature. But according to a source at one university, the field of law is also falling victim to such dwindling collaboration with foreign schools.

Specifically, Israeli academics seeking promotions at local universities must be assessed by means of surveys, if possible submitted by individuals at an elite university abroad. "There have always been refusals to referee, but in recent months there has been a rise in the phenomenon," a source at one local
university explains. In one case, requests were sent to 20 foreign experts, in two rounds. To date only one reply has been received. "It's unprecedented," the source says.

"If the Israeli government commits irrevocably to either a two-state (within 1967 borders) or one-state solution in which all Palestinians in both Israel and the occupied territories have equal rights to Israelis – I will be happy to engage with Israeli institutions," a senior researcher at a prestigious institution in Europe wrote recently, in response to a request to write an evaluation for an Israeli academic. "Until that day, no." Another European academic wrote: "I do not believe that this suffering of civilians can be justified and I believe that Israel is not acting in accordance with international human rights law. In light of that, I feel I cannot collaborate with any Israeli institution at the moment."

Correspondence of this sort is not generally publicized, but Philip Cohen, a professor of sociology and demography at the University of Maryland, decided otherwise. Two weeks ago, he explained in his blog why he had refused a request from the Israel Science Foundation to review a research proposal. "I believe the international community cannot permit the normalization of relations with the State of Israel in light of its actions in Gaza and the West Bank since October 7," he wrote, adding, "In the absence of responsible state action by your government (or ours), I must instead do what I can to contribute to the diplomatic, political, and even scientific isolation of the state... I don't know if my peers in Israel understand the extent of their global isolation."

In November, Prof. Gili Drori, dean of Hebrew University's social sciences faculty, took an unusual step. She decided to suspend
the "external assessment" of all the faculty members who were seeking to be promoted. The reason: the concern that feedback by foreign referees would be colored by the war in Gaza. It's difficult to think of a clearer manifestation of the deterioration in relations between Israeli academia and the international academic community. The suspension was, however, lifted three weeks later.

"The dam has burst," Drori declares now. "Talking about an academic boycott of scientists in Israel has become legitimate. It's a whole new world. We are in a very extreme situation, and I don't know whether and how it will be possible to reverse things. The boycott is severing our ability to be involved in the forefront of research. All scientific research that does not involve the international community is research that is less good. The severance from the world is suffocating us."

If the pool of international experts who are willing to cooperate with Israel does continue to shrink, Israeli academics will face discouraging alternatives: to approach less senior academics from less well-regarded universities (which, according to a knowledgeable source, is already happening in some cases), or to increase the proportion of assessments provided by local faculty – not a particularly palatable solution.

"Inbreeding in a family is not recommended, and it's the same in academia," says one source. "In the absence of fresh blood, academia degenerates." The implication, he adds, is "a radical change in the process of promotion, which will affect the ranking of the institutions in international indices, where they examine, among other things, the potency of the promotion processes. If the refusal trend continues, we can give up the ambition of being the Harvard of the Middle East."
A number of universities and academic organizations in Belgium, Spain, Italy and Norway recently announced full boycotts or a suspension of ties with Israeli institutions until they receive clarifications with regard to topics ranging from the state of academic freedom on their campuses, to their moral, financial and material support for Israel's defense forces. For one, Ghent University recently requested such information from its counterpart in Haifa.

Yet some heads of college and university administrations still take the view that the situation "hasn't yet reached the point of no return," as one puts it. "It's too early to know how the process we are now involved in will unfold," adds another. After all, new articles by local scholars are still being accepted for publication, research requests have been submitted and discussed abroad. But for one, Tel Aviv University President Ariel Porat says that, "there are too many people in academia [abroad] who see us as outcasts. There is no doubt that the numbers are large. I don't remember a situation when entire universities sought to boycott us."

"The best-case scenario is that within a short time we will return to some sort of stability," says American studies professor Milette Shamir, vice president of Tel Aviv University and director of its international academic collaborations. "Our standing in the world will be rehabilitated and we will be able to return to the situation we were in, to very extensive international activity."

But Shamir acknowledges that she "doesn't know whether that scenario is realistic." Two weeks ago, she was in Australia to attend an academic fair at the University of Sydney. When she arrived, pro-Palestinian demonstrators shouted that Tel Aviv...
University shares in crimes against the Palestinians and that all collaborations with Israel should end.

"The worst-case scenario is that we are headed in the direction of South Africa [in the apartheid period]," she says, "with boycotts that keep mounting to the point of paralyzing the system. The result will be a mortal blow to Israeli academia. It will take on a provincial character and we will not be able to integrate into the forefront of the world's research."
Dear Prof. Benoit-Antione Bacon,

I first want to wish you congratulations and much success in your new role as President and Vice-Chancellor. The University of British Columbia (UBC) is an excellent school, and we have always felt a deep connection with our university partners in Canada, given the historical ties between our two countries.

However, we are deeply concerned about a recent UBC Senate decision to vote on “a motion regarding cutting or suspending academic ties with Israeli government entities (including public universities).” This motion implies that Tel Aviv University (TAU) is somehow an agent of the Israeli government and that our academic freedom may be bound by the government. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I am compelled to correct this misunderstanding and underscore our values.

Protection of Free Speech and Academic Freedom at TAU

The 2024 Academic Freedom Index measures academic freedom worldwide. According to this index Israeli universities are on par with universities in Canada, and ahead of countries like the UK, the Netherlands, and the US.

TAU takes its role very seriously as defender of democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression, and operates independently of the government and military. While there are researchers at our universities who, in accordance with their academic freedom and rights, do research on subjects related to Israel’s security, we have others who raise incisive questions and hold critical perspectives about Israel’s governmental and military policies in the current conflict. In fact, TAU was the first university in Israel to hold a conference on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

There has never been a student nor staff member punished at TAU for expressing pro-Palestinian views. On the contrary, we defend their right to voice even the most controversial statements. Last month, I was summoned to appear before the Israeli parliament regarding a TAU faculty member who expressed admiration for a convicted Palestinian terrorist. I refused to appear, and TAU rebuffed the intense public pressure to discipline or expel that faculty member. A year ago, the
government introduced a bill to ban waving the Palestinian flag on Israeli campuses; I declared that such a law was unconstitutional and that we would refuse to comply should the bill pass. This happened during the time of the broader judicial overhaul attempt, which our academic community – from our students to our Senate – protested vociferously.

And while some suggest that TAU is an agent of the government by the mere fact that we have students who are soldiers, please understand that Israel is a small country and that most 18-year-olds here are legally required to enlist in the army. Later, they serve in the reserves. Many of our students were called up for duty in the months since the massacre of October 7th, and these students (and some faculty members) have risked their lives to protect their loved ones and country. For those who have returned, we have a moral duty to support their mental health and help them get back to their studies successfully; we feel certain that no university that cares for its students would proceed otherwise in these circumstances.

Promoting Coexistence, Inclusion and Peace

We are one of the most diverse communities in Israel; 16 percent of our student population is Palestinian (this mirrors the percentage of Palestinians in Israel’s population). TAU was the first university in the country to establish a Commission for Equity, Diversity and Community. Today, through the commission, we run a “gap year” program for young Palestinians adults not yet enrolled in university, coordinate the Faculty for a Shared Campus forum, chaired by an Arab and a Jewish faculty member together; and offer a range of funded academic and extracurricular activities that bring together Jewish and Palestinian students.

We also offer programs specifically for Palestinian students, like Sawa (via the Office of Student Success), the Cohn Program (in Humanities), and the Neubauer Fellowships (for STEM PhD students and faculty members). These programs provide Palestinian students with a combination of funding, mentorship, academic support, and cultural community.

TAU also collaborates on many projects that foster peace and justice in the wider region. Our European Studies program is a trilateral MA degree wherein Israeli, Jordanian, and West-Bank Palestinian students study together in Germany. Our faculty in engineering collaborate with Arab researchers at Jordan’s particle accelerator. Faculty in TAU’s Middle East Studies are bridging political divides through The Program for Regional Cooperation and the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation. And our TAU colleagues from environmental science, medicine,
zoology, and life sciences collaborate with Palestinian and Jordanian partners on regional issues related to climate change, sustainable development, agriculture, and public health.

Our faculty members are also involved in many community-based initiatives serving Palestinians. For decades, TAU’s law clinics have represented Palestinians in discrimination cases related to land and housing. Our School of Medicine has initiatives to advance inclusion in Israel’s public hospitals and health system. TAU’s Faculty of Humanities helps low-income Arab families in Lod and Jaffa, while the Department of Theatre Arts works with Jewish and Arab children in Ramle.

**Why Academic Boycotts are Dangerous**

What most protestors against Israeli universities can’t seem to fathom is that we too mourn the horrific loss of innocent life, are worried over this ongoing war, and want a better future for Palestinians and Israelis both. However, academic boycotts are not a way to get to that goal and may very well cause more harm than good.

It would not surprise you to know that in Israel there is a high correlation between one’s level of education and one’s commitment to liberal-democratic values, the rule of law, and supporting a just solution to the conflict. Many like to think the boycotts would be transformative much in the same way that they were in South Africa. Tragically, in today’s context, weakening institutions committed to democracy is more likely to move Israel in the direction of an increasingly militarized and illiberal state.

Just as UBC is dedicated to fostering democracy, human rights, and a more inclusive society, so is TAU – and our fight to protect these rights is more crucial than ever. For research and education to thrive, and for universities to continue their special role as bastions of liberal values and critical thinking, they cannot be endangered by academic sanctions and boycotts.

If you could please help UBC’s Senate to better understand our position in Israel, it would be much appreciated. Academic boycotts are dangerous, and we sincerely hope that Senate members will choose the path of collaboration in the coming days.

Respectfully,

A. Porat

Professor Ariel Porat

President
May 29, 2024

Dear Members of the UBC-Vancouver Senate:

I am a Professor in the UBC Department of Political Science and write out of deep concern about the proposed boycott of Israeli educational institutions. In the interest of full disclosure, I add that I am currently the Head of my Department and a member of the Jewish Academic Alliance of BC (JAABC), a newly formed group that seeks to make universities welcome and inclusive spaces for their Jewish faculty, staff, and students. However, I write strictly in my individual capacity as a faculty member and not as a representative of either my department or the JAABC. In these brief remarks, I will speak to two points: my concerns about the harms that a targeted boycott of Israel would inflict on academic life here at UBC and my deep doubts about the effectiveness of an academic boycott in achieving its proponents’ goals.

I write to you as a longstanding supporter of Palestinians’ rights to equality and self-determination, including an end to the occupation, and as an ardent opponent of Israel’s current military operations in Gaza. My concerns with the proposed academic boycott do not question the fundamental goals of advancing peace and justice in the region, now and in the long term. My concern, rather, is that ending relationships with Israeli universities will not only be counterproductive in relation to these goals, but will also come at a heavy price for faculty, students, and staff at UBC.

A targeted boycott of Israeli universities would strike a serious blow to academic freedom at UBC. Under this body’s own policy on academic freedom, “The members of the University enjoy certain rights and privileges essential to the fulfilment of its primary functions: instruction and the pursuit of knowledge. Central among these rights is the freedom, within the law, to pursue what seems to them as fruitful avenues of inquiry, to teach and to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints, and to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion.” An academic boycott of Israel would violate this core principle because it would constrain instructors’ and researchers’ choices about whom they may collaborate with in their teaching and scholarship, and would do so for non-academic, political reasons.

The constraints that a boycott would impose are not notional: teachers and researchers across campus work with Israeli counterparts in myriad domains of inquiry. Our colleagues in the fields of physics, medical and health research, psychology, education, and the study of ancient cultures have been engaged in enormously fruitful collaborations with Israeli institutions. Within the medical field alone, these collaborations have been generating advances and student training in areas including cancer treatment, coronary disease, ultra-sensitive diagnostics, the social and environmental determinants of health, and care-provision in remote and Indigenous communities in Canada.\(^1\) Notably, many of these projects and training opportunities involve Palestinian as well as Jewish researchers and students. Cutting UBC’s ties with Israeli institutions would end or, at a minimum, seriously encumber much or all of this inquiry and student training. It would hinder colleagues’ and students’ ability to pursue fruitful lines of inquiry and to teach and learn in areas

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\(^1\) These examples draw on informal canvassing by the JAABC, which likely captured an incomplete picture of collaborations with Israeli institutions.
and with collaborators of their choosing.

I take little comfort from boycott proponents’ frequent claims that a boycott would impact only formal institutional partnerships, leaving the door open for individual scholars to interact. Any measure that ends, limits, or discourages UBC’s ability to enter into agreements with other institutions will inevitably impede cooperation among individual scholars and instructors, hampering their ability, for instance, to secure funding for joint projects or to jointly teach and train students. A boycott would also very likely have a broad chilling effect on such collaborations by stigmatizing such endeavors in the eyes of the UBC community and making Israeli academics understandably reluctant to engage with individuals at UBC.

Importantly, cutting ties with Israeli institutions would also have a disproportionate impact on teaching, learning, and research on Jewish history, culture, and religion. A boycott of Israel would make it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain faculty and students in Jewish Studies, with the likely result that the field will cease to exist as a meaningful area of inquiry at UBC.

I am also concerned about the potential negative effect on UBC’s global reputation. Were this body to adopt the boycott motion, it would make UBC the first major research university in North America to end ties with Israeli institutions. This would be an enormous step with potentially wide-ranging consequences – some fairly predictable (as I outline here) and some likely much more difficult to predict. As someone with extensive international networks and continued ties at my alma mater institutions in the US and UK, I would struggle to explain a boycott like this to my colleagues in the global scholarly community. I consider it inconsistent not only with the role of a leading research university but also with the scholarly pursuit as a whole.

Meanwhile, I find it very hard to see what positive outcome an end to academic ties with Israel would achieve. I can understand the impetus to distance ourselves from injustices being committed by the current Israeli government. However, Israeli universities seem to me entirely the wrong target for censure and international ostracism as they are among the most progressive and equality-advancing institutions in Israeli society. The case for a boycott seems premised on the claim, advanced in part by recent work conducted here at UBC, that Israeli institutions are little more than instruments of oppression of Palestinians. It is certainly the case that Israeli universities are entangled with broader power structures and dominant-group attitudes in Israeli society, and that this is reflected in some of their activities and administrative actions in ways that most of us would find problematic. But based on what I know more broadly about academic life in Israel, the characterization of Israeli universities as mere tools of oppression is a gross distortion. I urge senators to read Professor Guy Stecklov’s (UBC Sociology) thoughtful, nuanced response to the “deep complicity” narrative, included in the JAABC’s submission to Senate.

No doubt, Israeli institutions of higher education still have a considerable distance to go in achieving full equity and inclusion on their campuses for Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. But as detailed by Professor Stecklov and in the JAABC’s brief, the Palestinian share of university student bodies and high-status occupations (e.g., doctors) has grown sharply over the last 10-15 years, partly as a result of major investments by universities in expanding opportunities. Israeli universities are also essential fora for critical inquiry into the Israeli state and for advancing cooperation and collaboration between Jews and Arabs in Israel-Palestine. Like academic institutions everywhere, Israeli universities both reflect some of the pathologies of the society in which they are embedded and cultivate critique and challenge of prevailing power structures, often facing attack by government actors for playing this critical role.

As an advocate for an end to this war and to the occupation, I would not like to imagine a world in which Israeli academic institutions have been hobbled by international isolation. An international boycott would leave Israel’s universities far weaker – both as engines of expanded
opportunity and as voices for social and policy change – ceding tremendous ground in Israeli politics and society to extremist voices outside the Academy.\textsuperscript{2}

Aside from the substance of the question under consideration, I would also like to draw attention to the excessive haste with which Senate is being asked to consider this motion. Senate is being asked to vote on this decision with very little notice and almost no consultation with the University community. Those of us submitting statements are doing so without having seen the language of the motion on which a vote will be taken. Moreover, we have been told that we must submit our input in writing, rather than being permitted to speak at the meeting. In short, were senators to adopt a boycott motion today, they would be doing so without having had time to learn meaningfully about the issues at stake or about how a boycott would impact those whom they represent on this body.

I encourage senators interested in advancing peace and justice in Israel-Palestine to consider more meaningful ways of doing so. These might include expanding UBC’s Scholars at Risk program for academics from the region; promoting research, teaching, and dialogue on campus about just and peaceful solutions to the conflict; and, on a more personal level, seeking out and supporting grassroots, Jewish-Palestinian groups on the ground in the region that are organizing for progressive change. Engagement, not disengagement, must be our way forward as an academic community.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Jacobs
Professor
UBC Department of Political Science

\textsuperscript{2} The example of the international academic boycott of South Africa is often invoked as a supportive precedent. However, having spent a good deal of time searching the literature on the sanction and boycott movement against Apartheid, I have uncovered no research establishing that the boycott of universities itself played a positive role in ending Apartheid.
On Academic Boycott Demands and *Towers of Ivory and Steel*
27 May 2024  
Guy Stecklov, Department of Sociology, UBC

Highly emotional protests at UBC and campuses across North America continue to push for an academic boycott of Israeli universities, among other responses to the continued loss of life in Gaza. Efforts are targeting the UBC Academic Senate to try and end UBC’s relationships with Israeli universities. A recently published book, *Towers of Ivory and Steel* (Verso, 2024), by Dr. Maya Wind, has received considerable attention in this context as it aims to convince readers that Israeli academia should be boycotted because of the “…complicity of Israeli institutions of higher education in Israel’s projects of settler colonialism and apartheid.” (p.8).

The underlying purpose of the book, which is clearly stated, is to help to support an international boycott of Israeli universities. If in fact Israeli universities are truly “one of the pillars of this oppressive order” (p.7), as quoted in the book and argued by the PABCI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), then cutting off relations might appear a reasonable step. Here we argue that while there is little doubt that Israeli academic institutions have at times adopted policies and practices that act against the interests of Palestinians (and Jews) in Israel, the book entirely ignores the crucial role of Israeli universities in expanding opportunity for Palestinians - primarily Palestinian Citizens of Israel (hereafter, “PCI”) as well as Palestinians who reside in the Occupied Territories. Despite undeniable cases of problematic behavior by Israeli universities, the question to be considered by policymakers, such as the UBC Senate, is whether the available evidence - not political rhetoric - show that universities in Israel have failed in their fundamental mission of expanding education and scientific progress while helping Israel to become a better and more equitable and just society for all its citizens.

Boycotts are one among a range of available tools to exert pressure (Nussbaum 2007). If academic boycotts are to be employed then the decision to support a boycott of academic institutions necessitates an evaluation of the benefits and costs. Emotional satisfaction associated with revenge against Israel’s policies alone or gratifying the needs of the “crowd” should not be driving the calculus of an academic boycott. The benefits may appear to be large if the academic boycott forces Israel to shift policy in a desired direction that is consistent with international laws. The benefits may be small if they do not shift Israeli policies unless, regrettably, one is motivated by revenge (de Shalit 2016). Below, we explain why the boycott, as argued in the Maya Wind book, or a type of disengagement from Israeli university ties as under consideration at UBC, overestimates the benefits of a boycott and understates the likely costs.

a. Will academics in Israel respond to the boycott of their institutions by increasing pressure on the state? If academic institutions include academics of varying political and ideological perspectives, from far-left and critical voices of the government to more right-wing and hardline voices, a boycott may well lead to a strengthening of voices that urge rallying around the flag and a weakening of more liberal voices calling for moderation. This reduces the likelihood the boycott will succeed.

b. Do academics in Israel have a sufficiently powerful voice and wield sufficient political weight to alter state policy even if they push harder? There are good reasons to doubt whether academics in Israel have the necessary political leverage to sway the debate (de
Shalit 2016). There is little compelling evidence about academic boycotts from other contexts and little reason to expect the academic boycott will help sway Israeli policy.

c. **Impact on Palestinian students and scholars:** Academic institutions are tools for increasing educational and career opportunities for all groups within a country. This is also true in Israel. The boycott will harm Jewish students but also PCI as well as Palestinians who are not citizens. The Palestinian students will both be impacted indirectly by increasing the strength of hardliners and directly by reducing opportunities available in a weakened Israeli academic environment. (More below in response to the Wind book.) These likely large-scale costs should be considered in evaluating a potential boycott.

d. **Universities are part of the defense of democracy:** Universities are at the forefront of a struggle against efforts by the Israeli government to weaken democracy. This effort has been muted since October 7th but continues. A marginalized University environment means a greater chance that Israel’s democracy, imperfect though it might be, will further decay with great costs to its population - Jews and Palestinians alike.

e. **Loss of scientific production and the pursuit of knowledge:** Israel has an impressive record of innovation, particularly in the health, technology and agricultural fields. Collaboration and partnership among researchers are essential components of the creation process and the advancement of scientific projects. This is best carried out when one has the freedom to choose, and to consider choosing, their collaborators without unnecessary boundaries or hurdles, within the confines of the law. Boycotts impacting these institutions will undoubtedly hurt scientific output and detract from the global pursuit of knowledge both within Israel but also for those around the world, including UBC, that collaborate with Israeli academic institutions or build on their advances. Are the benefits of an academic boycott, which is unlikely to be effective, sufficient to offset possible losses to scientific progress?

f. **If the boycott is not perceived as “fair” by Israeli society, by and large, then the boycott pressure may backfire.** There are few calls on our campus for boycotting Chinese or Iranian universities, although very reasonable arguments could be made that both countries are in violation of international laws and norms (China: occupation of Tibet, threatening Taiwan, internment camps for Uyghurs; Iran: violation of basic rights of women in Iran, funding and training terror organizations including Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houtis). This does *not* exonerate Israel’s actions but important questions must be asked about why Israel now when other actors remain legitimate targets for boycotts (Nussbaum 2007). Where does this lead? It may well be that perceptions of unfair treatment generate more rather than less resistance within Israel and would be counterproductive reducing the chances of the boycott’s success.

g. **Impact on UBC and Canadian Faculty and Students:** We cannot ignore the costs of the boycott or even disengagement on faculty and students at UBC who are directly impacted by a curtailing of their academic relationships, their opportunities, and their academic freedoms. When a boycott is sought that has direct connections to a group’s ethno-religious background, Jews, the boycott’s high cost on a minority group should not be underestimated.

We now turn to *Towers of Ivory and Steel*, which argues that boycotting universities will hurt the Israeli Academy and that in and of itself is a good outcome because there exists “overwhelming evidence of academia’s complicity with the apartheid state.” (p.73). This book is filled with reporting that highlights how universities impinge on the rights of Palestinians - both PCI and those from the Occupied Territories - and ultimately fail to help produce a more educated and successful population of all its people. From Wind’s perspective, the costs of boycotting the
universities are exceedingly small so a boycott is a valuable step irrespective of whether it actually helps to modify Israel’s policies.

However, if Israeli universities are actually positive forces in Israeli society – if they are part of the solution for a better society – then this clearly alters the calculus of the boycott because weakening these institutions is unlikely to change Israel’s policy but will most certainly impose substantial costs. Unfortunately, in the zeal to paint Israeli universities as “academic institutions directly and actively implicated in what has overwhelmingly been recognized as a regime of apartheid” (p. 9), Dr. Wind’s examples pitch an unrelenting, unbalanced one-sided perspective of Israeli universities.

The most serious error relates to painting the post-secondary academic environment as one that is failing PCI. It is sadly true that Israel, like many other Western and non-Western nations, has struggled to fully incorporate minorities and PCI are no exception. However, for those convinced that Israeli universities are failing to help move towards this fundamental goal, the factual evidence must be surprising. Drawing on data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, Debowy et al (2021) show the overall progress in the share of students, primarily PCI but also Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, in each level of higher education. There is an approximate doubling of the shares in most levels – BA, MA and PhD – with the Arab student share of the total student population at the BA level having risen from 10% to almost 19% between 2009 and 2021. This remains below the percentage of Arabs in the appropriate age groups – roughly 26-27% - but points to encouraging trends. It is also true that a higher share of PCI are enrolled in colleges, rather than universities, but the academic environment in Israel has been increasingly decentralized with colleges growing rapidly and offering strong programs and catering to populations across the country. College options also provide local avenues for study for groups less willing or able to send their sons and daughters to live away from home.

Ultimately, if academic education – be it college or university-based – is claimed to be increasingly fair, greater representation in high status professions should also be demonstrable. If Arab students are increasing in lower status educational tracks and not in high profile, high status fields, then success remains elusive and increasing shares in post-secondary education might merely conceal a shift into lower quality tracks – a veneer of success. This apparent “failure” of the system to make progress is emphasized by Wind in repeated claims (p.57-58). However, compelling evidence of meaningful improvement emerges from analyses of data on the medical profession which highlight the inaccuracy of Wind’s one-sided portrayals (Tur-Sinai et al 2020). In terms of the profession as a whole, Arab doctors in Israel (PCI) are largely underrepresented in the profession. However, the share of doctors who are Arab has increased from 7.7% in 2000 to 14.7% in 2016 – a near doubling if still below their population share. More importantly, the share of new physicians who are Arab, young cohorts recently completing medical school, has grown from 11.2% in 2000 to 33.3% in 2016. Thus, despite many claims raised by Wind that “admission of Palestinian students to medicine and other competitive fields continues to be manipulated by state and university administrations,” (p.57) the evidence signals clear progress rather than nefarious manipulation.

Progress in the sphere of legal professions – lawyers and judges - offers an additional litmus test. According to published data up through the 1990s from the Israel Democracy Institute (2017),
there were less than 10 Arab judges in all of Israel but that figure rose by 2017 to over 50 judges and they now make up nearly 8 percent of all judges. Similarly, undeniable gains are seen within the Office of the State Attorney. While no Arabs were working in this vital office back in the 1990s, nearly 60 lawyers from the Arab sector were employed in the Office of the State Attorney by 2017 and they now account for just under 6% of the lawyers on staff. Clearly, both areas demonstrate a need for more inclusion but also undeniable gains.

Israeli universities have been critical in the drive for a more equitable society. Despite wars and political tensions in Israel that existed long before October 7th, the universities have been successful at training both Jews and Arabs at all levels of the post-secondary education system and in preparing them for the workforce, helping to create a better, more equitable society. Undeniably, strong conservative forces – some with openly stated opposition to preserving freedom of expression and equality within the country - are working to influence the educational system and weaken its ability to continue this mission. However, universities remain one of the only effective bulwarks against these pressures, and the cost of boycotting these institutions is likely to be a weakening of democratic institutions more broadly. A less democratic Israel is truly a threat - one that cannot be an aim of those seeking a boycott - and the ultimate consequences would surely be a deterioration in conditions for Palestinians as well as Jews and less likelihood of movement towards a safer future for both peoples.

At its core, the Wind book completely ignores the success of universities in Israel in promoting a more equitable, diverse, educated and employed population while advancing the broader goals of scientific excellence. The actual record completely contradicts the message in the book and would mean that boycotting Israeli universities could have tremendous costs for all groups in Israel. Here, a few additional key points where the Wind book is inaccurate are also discussed to offer a fairer perspective on Israeli universities. The lesson we seek to demonstrate is that this selective effort to push for a boycott of universities is deeply flawed, building on a mischaracterization of universities as failing to contribute to broader engagement and progress among both Jews and Arabs.

Restricting research that confronts Israel’s violent and sometimes dark past: Wind presents the painful story of the Tantura massacres and the efforts by some university officials at University of Haifa to stop publication and not approve a student MA thesis on the topic. This is indeed a terrible failure on the part of the University of Haifa and deserves condemnation. However, the broader lesson from this however is that academics in Israel have a history of uncovering and deconstructing the myths of early state-making policies and violent events in Israel’s past and had institutional or broader boycotts been in effect this research and their publication may well have never occurred. It is precisely such scholarship which has shocked Israeli academics and non-Israeli ones and has forced people to open eyes to a complex history rather than the preferred myths of state creation. Regrettably, scholars have paid a price for these actions. Yet, within Israel’s universities, scholars continue to push back and demand an accounting as evident from a recent public letter from a group of 11 faculty members from University of Haifa that called for steps to rectify the silencing and non-approval of the Katz MA thesis (see Haaretz newspaper 23 June 2022). In a boycotted university, this research may well have never occurred and come to light. A boycotted Israeli academia might well push further towards silencing dissension and less towards academic freedom. If so, how does a boycott contribute to a better
truth and a more just and open society? Academic boycotts would likely have meant a history that would remain hidden and Israeli scholarship that would have been less likely to force Israelis to confront with unappealing and violent parts of their past and present.

Restricting academic freedom: Wind describes the effort of the Council of Higher Education (CHE) to impose an academic ethical code, which failed but was then replaced by a set of ethical principles that “…currently serve as the official state-mandated regulations governing faculty expression.” This is part of a one-sided presentation by Wind that systematically leaves out any and all efforts - in many cases successful - to push back against efforts to strangle academic freedom. A conservative Minister of Education (Bennett) indeed led an effort to force universities in 2018 to draft a code of conduct for faculty members. Strong pushback from universities in Israel forced the government to publish proposed ethical guidelines in place of a code and also left implementation at the discretion of each institution. As far as we know, neither the Hebrew University nor other central universities have adopted such a code to date. More recently at Tel Aviv University, its president ignored a call to appear in front of parliament due to calls to discipline and expel a faculty member who expressed admiration for a convicted Palestinian terrorist. Tel Aviv University also declared that they would not enforce a government bill, which they declared unconstitutional, that banned waving the Palestinian flag on Israeli campuses.

Supporting groups that are antithetical to the academic mission: The example regarding the highly controversial “Im Tirtzu” is also misrepresented. Wind writes, “…Hebrew University added Im Tirtzu in 2019 to the list of recognized entities whose volunteer work can earn university credit.” It is true that in 2019, following a decision to award academic credits for voluntary activity in NGOs, Hebrew University began to award credits without screening the type of NGO in which students worked. In that particular year, several students received credit for their activity with Im Tirtzu. However, there is no mention that in the very next year, and consistently since then, the university has not recognized activity in political NGOs, meaning service in Im Tirtzu no longer provides student credit.

Silent Academics: Wind argues that “Israeli universities have remained silent over decades as Israeli policies have continued to stifle Palestinian universities.” This is inaccurate and we offer just one recent example. In response to government efforts to constrain Palestinian universities in their decisions about guest scholars, the Hebrew University Senate, in a unanimous vote (4 abstentions) on June 22nd 2022, with the consent of the university's administration, called for the Israeli government to amend its policy to ensure that the Israeli authorities do not interfere with the Palestinian universities' decisions about guest scholars and fields of study. More broadly, pressure from pro-boycott forces have led to a closure of wide-ranging joint Palestinian-Israeli academic interactions to avoid any impression of positive collaboration.

Despite these critiques, Towers of Ivory and Steel is a valuable book, where accurate in its representation, because it demands accountability from Israeli universities for instances where Palestinian rights or academic freedom in Israel and the Occupied Territories more broadly have been insufficiently protected. However, Wind, along with much of the BDS campaign against universities in Israel, entirely ignores the hidden costs of an academic boycott. Most serious among these unmentioned costs is the reality that Israeli universities, which are working in a
country with an increasingly conservative and religious government, continue to be one of the few stakeholders that contribute to a better society. Weakening universities in Israel will undoubtedly weaken resistance at a time when liberal and democratic notions are under deep threat. Israeli universities are helping to create a more equitable and educated society with far better opportunities for all Israeli citizens – Jews and non-Jews alike. These universities deserve to be engaged with and supported rather than demonized. In place of boycotts, other preferable actions, including engagement would be far more useful. Increasing efforts to bring together sides and create partnerships are not a sure-fire recipe for success, but they are consistent with the mission of universities – including UBC - and a central goal of the sciences.

**References**


May 28, 2024

To the UBC Senate

I am writing this letter as a longtime faculty member in the Department of Medicine who is very concerned by the motion before the Senate Committee of UBC regarding cutting or suspending academic ties with Israeli government entities including public institutions.

Let me introduce myself. I am a Professor of Medicine at the University of British Columbia, a Medical Oncologist at BC Cancer (and former academic Head of Medical Oncology), chair of the UBC/BC Cancer Research Ethics Board and a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. I have had an excellent career at UBC which has provided me with the opportunity to publish over 340 peer reviewed manuscripts, successfully apply for grant funding, participate and lead provincial, national and international boards (including chairing the Ontario Institute of Cancer Research scientific advisory board), and present research at many international meetings. I have been involved in teaching through UBC at all levels from students, to residents, to fellows and colleagues as well as allied health professionals and the lay public. I have been involved in discoveries going from the laboratory into standard clinical practice and part of improving outcomes for persons with cancer. I have had a very large clinical practice where I have treated thousands of persons in British Columbia.

In my career, I have interacted with many persons and institutions from Israel, including being on the executive of an international clinical trial that has shown that a drug, olaparib, can improve the survival of persons with early breast cancer who harbour an inherited genetic mutation. That trial was co-chaired by an oncologist from Israel, Dr Bella Kaufman (z”l) who I had previously worked with during a sabbatical in 1998 on a research project to improve the education and testing framework for persons with BRCA mutations. Dr. Kaufman was President of the Board of the Israeli chapter of Physicians for Human Rights, an organization which has been instrumental in treating persons from Gaza and the West Bank with appropriate medical care. With Bella and other academic physicians from the University of Tel Aviv, Hebrew University, Haifa University and Ben Gurion University I have participated in medical mobile clinics in the West Bank and Gaza over the last 20 years. We were all there to help provide care. These are not the people one wants to cut off.

I have worked on other research endeavours with Israeli academics including with Dr Yossi Yarden from the Weizman Institute. This increased my knowledge of HER2 positive breast cancers when the field was new and led to my participation as a UBC faculty on trials that showed the benefit of first one and then another antibody (trastuzumab and pertuzumab) which have now become standard of care for treatment of this disease. A medical oncologist from Tel Aviv was my fellow at BC Cancer/UBC for 3 years and was very productive publishing some important papers and collaborating with many UBC faculty members. She is now one of the top medical oncologists in Israel. I have been involved in helping UBC persons link with the excellent palliative care teaching in Israel through Hebrew University. And I have been to Israel many times to lecture at their high-quality academic conferences. I have been involved in grant reviews for Israeli academics who are focussed on endeavours that unite us, science and medicine.

Others at UBC have also had very rewarding relationships with universities in Israel including Dr Pieter Cullis, one of UBC’s stars, who I have worked with for the last 35 years researching new agents with novel drug delivery properties. Dr Cullis is travelling to Israel on May 29th, 2024, to receive the Harvey Award from the Technion recognizing to his amazing work.

Members of academic communities in Israel have been amongst the most vocal and active constituents in the nation's peace movement and in the demonstrations against the current government. Cutting ties with them will not solve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza but will restrict and limit fruitful dialogue between progressive-minded academics looking to collaborate and learn. These persons would be punished with a ruling from UBC. They are not spokespeople for the Israeli government. We have not had these rulings for Chinese Universities despite the treatment of the Uyghurs, or universities in the US which are in...
states that discriminate against women by limiting their reproductive rights, to name a few. UBC Senate has not sanctioned other countries who have participated in humanitarian actions that we may not agree with. Why should we discriminate against Israeli universities? This differential treatment of Israel by the UBC Senate does not just affect Israelis. The repercussions include wider collateral harm to academics and to the Jewish community in BC and Canada, on and off the UBC campus.

In our current climate of explicit anti-racism, it is concerning that an ethnicity that accounts for less than 0.2% of the world population incurs such strong discriminatory attitudes. It is also important to realize that a minority of Israelis are descendants of Europeans, and a larger number are Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews who are descended from persons who were expelled from the Arab countries in 1948 where they had lived for over 2000 years. And there are some Israelis from Africa and some who have lived on that small stretch of land we now call Israel for hundreds of years.

The Peace Movement in Israel is centred with the educated university persons many of whom are distraught with their government and have been demonstrating against them now and prior to the war. There are well researched articles that confirm this. We also know that Israeli universities have been very productive in their exports to the rest of the world in numerous areas but many in computer and other technologies. Our cell phones would still be large blocks if it were not for Israeli technology. A Canadian from Edmonton named Benny Landa developed laser printing and colour printing technology during his studies at university in Israel resulting in a company called Indigo, that was the first to use this. I am sure UBC senators use colour printing and are indebted to Dr. Landa who has now developed a nanotechnology to move the area of printing ahead another step. The list goes on and on including discoveries in data storage and computing that we depend on in our daily lives particularly as academics. And of course, we should not forget cherry tomatoes which are an Israeli discovery.

I am writing to ask that you vote against this motion. Cutting ties with Israeli academics will not end this war, end the conflict, nor bring an end to the senseless deaths that have occurred and unfortunately continue to occur. It will only create more isolation, not just with Israeli academics but also with others at UBC who believe in free dialogue and continued academic freedom to interact with others in their fields. Regardless of funding, universities are not government or national agents. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) defines academic integrity as a “commitment, even in the face of adversity to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage. From these values flow principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action.” The UBC collaboration with Israeli universities has been an exemplar of these values.

Thank you for your consideration of this.

Yours sincerely

Karen A Gelmon BA MD FRCPC
Professor of Medicine, University of British Columbia
Medical Oncologist, BC Cancer
Chair, UBC /BC Cancer Research Ethics Board
Fellow, Canadian Academy of Health Sciences
Dear Senators,

I am writing to you as a concerned member of the Faculty of Medicine in the department of Medical Genetics and a Killam Professor at UBC. My concerns relate to a motion under discussion for ending collaboration with academics at Israeli Universities. I have had numerous very productive collaboration with such academics which have led to novel insights in neurodegeneration and development of novel approaches to treatment of multiple sclerosis, ALS, and Vanishing White matter disease that sadly leads to death in childhood. These collaborations have been with the Weizmann institute and Tel Aviv University.

Incidentally this year’s Gairdner award was just given to a scientist form the Weizmann for his pioneering work in development of CAR-T therapy which represents a breakthrough for cancer therapy and is now being offered in our province.

Most Israeli universities and students are defending ideas that encourage freedom of opinion and tolerance and many of the students at these universities are fighting for a more just society. I grew up in South Africa and even in the darkest moments of apartheid, academic collaborations with South African Universities continued and benefitted from these international interactions. Even now, a motion to stop collaborations with Israeli universities was defeated at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

The Senate is viewed as speaking for the University as a whole. The Senate must be engaged in promoting the core functions of the university which are to foster and promote an environment supportive of research, teaching, and other scholarly activity and to promote an atmosphere where all students are not harassed and can pursue their scholarly endeavors. The university is a place of open inquiry and differing opinions. On political matters the Senate must maintain academic institutional neutrality. If the senate votes to prohibit interaction with academics in Israel, this will be a bad precedent.

Which global events will deserve such actions?

I do not support prohibiting academic interactions with China because of the horrific persecution of 2 million Uygers, or Iranian universities because of the killing of 1000s of students and protestors or the Russian universities because of the invasion and deaths of over 70,000 Ukrainians including many children and women.

This is not to say that individual senators cannot express their personal views. However in that instance they speak for themselves and not the university.

I am writing to you in an effort to protect our institution as in this instance the Senate represents our University.
I know of no other Canadian university that has passed such a motion which will undermine the purpose and reputation of our university.

Thank you for considering my views,

Sincerely,

Michael Hayden
MbChb, Phd, FRCP©, OBC,CM.

3 June 2024
Dear UBC Senators,

I am writing to share my experience as an Israeli exchange student at UBC in 2023 and to emphasize the importance of continuing the University’s exchange program with Israel. This program provides unique opportunities for students to gain knowledge and skills crucial for academic growth, fostering understanding, and facilitating collaboration between nations. As a third-year history and political science student from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I have benefited immensely from UBC’s expertise in environmental studies, Indigenous reconciliation, and promoting constructive dialogue on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These experiences have not only enriched my academic journey but have also provided me with valuable insights essential for addressing the challenges faced by Israel and the global community. I strongly believe that maintaining and expanding this exchange program is in the best interest of both UBC and Israel, as it allows for the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and knowledge while creating a platform for dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation.

I chose to apply to UBC because of its unique variety of environmental courses offered. The course I took about Global Environmental Politics with Professor Peter Dauvergne opened my eyes to critical questions and insights. The abundance of such courses at UBC is truly remarkable, as we do not have similar opportunities at Hebrew University. Therefore, it was crucial for me to seize this chance during my exchange. In this class, the presence of more exchange students compared to my other courses facilitated a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives. This highlights UBC’s significant role in educating students from diverse backgrounds about climate change, policy, and business. It is important to emphasize that although the impacts of global warming may vary across countries, it ultimately affects us all, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or nationality. At the same time, Israel faces some specific challenges in which UBC’s excellence provide valuable insights and inspiration. Addressing this shared problem requires collaboration on a global scale. For this reason, it is essential to have students from around the world, including Israelis, studying at UBC and engaging with these critical issues.

Coming to UBC was particularly interesting for me due to the University’s central emphasis on engaging with indigenous history and communities. During my time at UBC, I was introduced to the courageous steps taken to foster dialogue, negotiations, and reconciliation between the Indigenous nations and Canadians. I had the unique opportunity to learn more about this topic from a personal connection: my grandfather’s friend, who previously worked with him at the Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF), a think tank dedicated to promoting a two state solution. The friend currently works for the security department in the Squamish municipality. Through our conversations, I gained valuable insights into the various actions taken to facilitate dialogue, the challenges encountered, and the concessions made by both sides. For Israelis, learning from other countries that grapple with internal conflicts and painful pasts is an invaluable opportunity for mutual learning and growth. Although the history of our countries are not the same, the exchange program enables this kind of education, allowing students from Israel to benefit from UBC’s expertise in reconciliation processes. In turn, UBC has the potential to become a pioneer in this field, sharing its knowledge and experience with other countries facing internal conflict. By engaging with Israeli students who bring their own unique perspectives and experiences, UBC can further enrich its understanding of conflict resolution and reconciliation processes.
The exchange program also offered a unique opportunity to engage in dialogue about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During my time at UBC, I attended a Palestinian event called “Reframing the Narrative,” where one of the speakers was my professor, Dr. Hicham Saffiedine. Although I had hoped for a balanced discussion, I found the event to be one-sided, with crucial facts and perspectives missing. Despite feeling emotionally drained, I decided to speak up and engage in dialogue with the attendees. The following day, a Palestinian student who had recognized me from the event approached me, and we had a meaningful exchange of ideas. This experience reinforced my belief in the power of dialogue and the crucial role that exchange students can play in facilitating understanding within the university setting.

UBC’s commitment to fostering dialogue and understanding extends beyond the classroom. By providing a platform for students from diverse backgrounds to engage with one another, the university creates opportunities for growth, empathy, and collaboration. The Israeli-Canadian exchange program is a prime example of how UBC can leverage its position to promote dialogue and understanding, particularly in the context of complex international issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By bringing together students from different perspectives and experiences, UBC can contribute to the development of innovative solutions and bridge-building efforts that have the potential to create lasting change.

These perspective exchanges form the foundation of academia and are the key to conducting meaningful and valid research. UBC senators, instead of promoting boycotts and exclusion, you have the opportunity to champion dialogue and collaboration. By leveraging this exchange program, UBC can reinforce its position as a leader in fostering conversations, exchanging perspectives, and promoting reconciliation. After having the privilege of being an exchange student at UBC, I am convinced of the University’s tremendous potential to contribute to international discourse, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For that, you need us—students from one of the world’s most complex regions—just as much as we need you.

Sincerely,

Naama Koreh
May 20, 2024

Dear President Benoit-Antoine, Provost Averill, and Dean Crowston,

We write to express our concerns over recent calls by protestors on your campus to end partnerships with Israeli universities and the motion before the UBC Senate to end all academic ties with Israel and Israeli universities. We believe this case sets a very dangerous precedent of limiting the academic freedoms of members of your faculty who work in Jewish and Israel studies. Working with Israeli institutions and in Israel is crucial to many faculty in Jewish studies, and such a boycott would make it impossible for these faculty to carry out their academic scholarship. We urge to reaffirm the paramount importance of the freest possible international movement of scholars and ideas and reject proposals that curtail the freedom of teachers and researchers to engage in work with academic colleagues.

The Association for Jewish Studies, the largest learned society and professional organization representing Jewish studies scholars worldwide, is dedicated to its members’ intellectual and academic freedom. The organization’s statement of core values endorses the American Association of University Professors’ Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and opposes academic boycotts. The AJS is committed to the development and strengthening of an institutional and public culture that encourages diverse views, and supports its members’ right to articulate beliefs and positions without fear of retribution. We hope your university will take the necessary steps to protect the academic freedoms of all members of your community.

Thank you for your thoughtfulness on this matter,

Laura Leibman, President, Association for Jewish Studies
Helen Kim, VP of Program, Association for Jewish Studies
Laura Lieber, VP of Publications, Association for Jewish Studies
Hartley Lachter, VP of Membership and Outreach, Association for Jewish Studies
Lila Corwin Berman, Secretary/Treasurer, Association for Jewish Studies
Robin Judd, Past President, Association for Jewish Studies
Dear Members of the UBC Vancouver Senate,

I am a Professor of Jewish Studies, in the Department of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, and Chair of UBC’s Jewish Studies Minor. I am deeply concerned about the proposal to cut ties with Israeli institutions, including public universities. As far as I know, nearly all Israeli colleges and universities are public. I believe that doing so would significantly inhibit the academic freedom of professors and students in many areas, including Jewish Studies. I, for one, cannot do my job as a professor of Jewish Studies without access to and partnering with Israeli institutions.

Jewish Studies

Just like some 200 universities in North America, UBC has a Jewish Studies program. The Minor in Jewish Studies is an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary program in the Faculty of Arts. The program cannot fully function, participate in or contribute to discourse in the field without the ability to engage and partner with Israeli institutions. Primary sources, such as manuscripts, archaeological finds, the material culture of Jewish communities from throughout the ages, historical recordings, collections of Jewish art, and sources for the study of the Holocaust, are housed in Israeli universities and institutions. Public libraries such as National Library of Israel hold countless secondary sources – books, journals, long out-of-print and difficult to find publications, unpublished MA and PhD theses, specialized databases, and so on – all of which are necessary for comprehensive research and the advancement of knowledge on Jews, Judaism, and the history of the Middle East. For example, I recently published a series of articles in religious studies journals on lived religion in antiquity, publications that would not have been possible without access to archaeological finds located in the storerooms of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and several unpublished dissertations written at Israeli universities and available only at the National Library of Israel. Accessing these institutions is helpful, but the real flourishing of research comes from more sustained engagement and partnering with these institutions and their faculty and staff. Collaborating on conferences, grant applications, etc., ought to be undertaken with minimal obstacles.

Partnering with these institutions and their faculty and staff provides productive avenues for scholarly inquiry and the advancement of knowledge. For example, in 2019, I organized a conference “Charity in Classical Jewish Law” together with Hebrew University. The idea for the project was born when I met with a Hebrew U professor who was visiting Vancouver on an exchange program with UBC’s Allard Law School. The project gained approval and support from several bodies, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The two-day conference featured senior faculty from across Canada, the US, and the UK, as well as faculty and graduate students from Hebrew U and UBC. The students presented papers and participated in the discussions side-by-side with world renowned faculty. The conference provided an important professional development opportunity for the graduate students, as they sharpened their presentation skills, received feedback on their research, and began to establish professional connections with top researchers from around the world. In short, partnerships and collaborations with Israeli institutions are not only necessary, they are central to the flourishing of scholarship and the future of an essential field within Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies.

Archaeological Excavation: Course and research project

I am the co-director of an archaeological project, the excavation of the site of Horvat Midras, Israel. The project is a collaboration with Hebrew U, which reflects the norm, as excavations by researchers from outside of Israel (e.g., from Canada, the US, Europe, and elsewhere) all include formal ties with Israeli institutions. This provides local logistical support and brings together researchers from across the world to collaborate and exchange ideas.
The project has well-recognized academic credentials. It has received approval and funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, and approval as an affiliated project of ASOR (American Society of Overseas Research), the leading scholarly society of near eastern archaeology. The project has also been approved by the International Catacomb Society, and repeatedly by several offices at UBC, including the Dean of Arts and Go Global. The finds thus far have been published in well-respected venues, including our recent co-written, collaborative article in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Overseas Research*, considered a top journal in near eastern archaeology. The project seeks to enhance our understanding of rural life in the Levant by the excavation of an ancient village with several phases of occupation. We are interested in understanding the village’s social and religious character, how it changed, its daily life, and the impact of military conflicts, migration, and resettlement efforts. Located between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean coast, Horvat Midras was inhabited by several different groups from the 4th century BCE to the 16th century CE, including Persians, Idumeans (polytheists from southern Jordan), Jews, Roman polytheists, Byzantine Christians, and Muslims under the Abbasids, Mamluks, and early Ottoman regime. The project provides a unique opportunity for student education and opportunities for growth beyond the conventional classroom setting. Over the course of three weeks, the project entails daily excavation of the site, as well as field trips to other archaeological sites, and evening lectures by scholars from around the world (e.g., Fordham, Princeton) who come to visit and learn about the finds. We also welcome groups of students from around the world (e.g., from Brazil, Germany, and the US) who are interested in seeing the finds. This also provides us with an opportunity to workshop ideas and interpretations with a diverse array of visiting scholars and students. At the field school, the students do more than just digging — they learn and cultivate skills in the excavation, recording, and interpretation of primary sources, actively contributing to a research project. I would add that the excavation is as welcoming of staff and students with diverse identities as any that I know of. Our staff and students include individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, Muslim, Christian, Palestinian Citizens of Israel, Palestinians from the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and other underrepresented minorities — and this is just from the Hebrew U side. Our UBC students add further to this diversity, and we are proud that our project provides an opportunity for people to meet and get to know each other. Note that this is not just a quick hello, but rather sustained engagement as people talk and bond while excavating together in an archaeological trench, during group meals, sharing a dorm, and walking together on field trips. Shutting down this project — either with a *de jure* cutting of ties with Israeli institutions or a *de facto* boycott by discouraging participation through intimidation and stigmatizing the project — would bring an end to this opportunity for real sustained engagement on a human level.

Despite its credentials and accomplishments, which reflect several years of collaborative research, and despite its very significant value to students who participate, this project — both the archaeological field school (AMNE 395/595) and the excavation as a research project — have been singled out and targeted on a seemingly daily basis over the past few months, by often-anonymous individuals calling for its permanent cancellation. As someone who has spent my professional life studying the complex history of an enormously complex region, I am concerned that the perceived symbolic effect of this kind of action is not only misplaced but is actively damaging, and not only to me and my work. In my view, calls to put an end to a legitimate and important research project fail to appreciate the very real value that academic research represents to UBC students, to international collaborations, and to the pursuit of knowledge.

**Academic Freedom**

Cutting ties with Israeli universities will have real consequences on real students at UBC, and on faculty members’ ability to do their jobs. For me, the threat to academic freedom is not abstract. It is very real, immediate, and concrete. I wake up every morning wondering if I will be able to do my job that day. Research and teaching in Jewish Studies requires engaging with sources and resources in Israel on a regular basis, collaborating with Israeli scholars, institutions, and universities. Cutting ties formally, or enabling and legitimizing intimidation, demonization, and isolation — a *de facto* boycott — will prevent me from doing my teaching and research, and directly impinge upon my academic freedom.
Sincerely,

Gregg E. Gardner, Ph.D.,
Professor of Jewish Studies, Department of Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, UBC
Materials from Francis Andrew

The following suggested links:

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/24/zionism-seder-protest-new-york-gaza-israel


To: UBC-Vancouver Senate  
From: Steven Pelech  
Date: 2024 May 24  

Re: Critique of the proposal to severe associations with Israeli universities and divest from companies that supply Israel

Dear Senators,

I am responding to the e-mail letter that I received on May 6, 2024 from Ms. Harsha Walia, who was acting on behalf of 1,886 individuals including, UBC Alumni, current former workers and staff of UBC, as well as some faculty members and students who are calling for UBC to:

1. cut ties with Israeli institutions;  
2. condemn Israel’s genocide and scholasticide in Gaza;  
3. keep marginalized students on campus safe from police; and  
4. respect Palestinian right to return as enshrined under UNGA Resolution 194 and the right to resist as outlined under UNGA Resolution 2625.

I note that Ms. Walia was previously forced to resign in 2021 as a director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association because of a Tweet in which she expressed “Burn them all down” after the arson of two Roman Catholic churches in Canada soon following the claim of unmarked graves of 215 children near the former Kamloops Residential School site.1 Apparently, members of the Association, including Indigenous members, were uncomfortable with her calls for violent protests. Since then, more than 80 churches in Canada have since been subjected to arson, although no bodies have yet been uncovered from any of the claimed unmarked residential school grave sites across Canada. This demonstrates how poorly supported claims can incite violence against innocent members of our community, and how it is critical to get the facts straight.

Despite the choice of the messenger of the letter, the situation in Gaza is clearly a decades-long, ongoing human tragedy that was dramatically escalated by the Hamas attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023. We should be horrified by the destruction and loss of lives in both Israel and Gaza by the ongoing violence. However, this is presently a war both parties are actively engaged in, and civilians are also often frequent casualties of such conflicts.

In the literature that has been identified by url links in the letter provided by Ms. Walia nor in the letter itself, there are no referrals to the atrocities committed against Israeli citizens by Hamas on October 7th that were months if not years in planning, as evidenced by over 500 miles of secret underground tunnels in Gaza. On that day, Hamas launched about 3000 rockets into southern Israeli cities and towns and about a thousand fighters crossed the border of the Gaza Strip, to kill more than 1,100 Israelis, injuring 3,300, and seizing over 200 hostages, many of which are still in captivity.2 There have been periodic bombardments of Israel from Gaza by tens of thousands of rockets and mortars since 2001.3 According to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), since October 7th, 2023, there have been

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_rocket_attacks_on_Israel
9,500 rockets and mortars, as well as dozens of drones, fired at Israel mostly from the Gaza Strip.\(^4\) The New York Times estimated that between October 7\(^{th}\) and the end of 2023, there were some 12,000 rockets fired from Gaza into Israel.\(^5\) The IDF claims that some 900 rockets from Gaza were launched from within civilian sites, including mosques, schools, hospitals and cultural centers.\(^4\) By firing rockets from these locations, Hamas purposely endangered its own citizens, effectively using them as human shields. The consequences include the destruction of universities and schools as pointed out in Ms. Walia’s letter. It is difficult to determine how many missiles were launched against the Palestinian territories by the IDF to date, but Aljazeera reported that 25,000 tons of explosives were dropped against 12,000 targets between October 7\(^{th}\) and November 1\(^{st}\) in 2023 during the peak of the retaliatory bombardment.\(^6\)

Ms. Walia’s letter states that “over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, including at least 15,000 children.” These estimates were originally provided by the Hamas-run Government Media Office (GMO), and on May 8th, 2024, the U.N. Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has revised their estimates as 34,844 unaccounted for, and 24,686 confirmed dead, which was further broken down to 10,006 men, 4,959 women, 7,797 children and 1,924 elderly.\(^7\) While even these estimates are still unreliable and lower that originally stated, this is nonetheless horrific and much of the infrastructure of Gaza has been destroyed. Israel has fared much better due primarily to superior technology. Some 12% of the rockets launched by Hamas landed within Gaza according to the IDF.\(^5\) Like all wars, the human suffering has been immense, and people around the world are pushing for a cease-fire and an end to the hostilities.

Even those of us that are much older have grown up all of our lives aware of the ongoing conflicts between Israel and other Arab states, with Israel usually initially targeted for military actions by aggressors. Ms. Walia’s letter points to “over 100 years of settler colonial occupation, first by the British and then by Israel.” The fact of the matter is that the region has been in dispute and subjected to diverse occupations for thousands of years, including by the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans. From 1516 to the end of World War I, Palestine was occupied and controlled by the Ottoman Turkish Empire, which had converted to Islam.

Ms. Walia’s letter implies that the defensive actions of Israel represent “genocide” and “scholasticide.” “Genocide” refers to “the systematic and widespread extermination or attempted extermination of a national, racial, religious, or ethnic group.”\(^8\) The systematic killing of Jewish people in Nazi Germany clearly fits this definition. On the one hand, within Israel’s borders, there has been no evidence of government-sanctioned killing of peoples of Palestinian origin by decree or secretly. Arab Muslims account for about 21% of Israel’s population of 9.3

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\(^4\) https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-9500-rockets-fired-at-israel-since-oct-7-including-3000-in-1st-hours-of-onslaught/


\(^7\) https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/Gaza_casualties_info-graphic_8_May_2024.pdf

\(^8\) https://www.britannica.com/topic/genocide
million people.\textsuperscript{9} The Palestinians and Jews are both semitic peoples, highly genetically related, and to a large extent culturally similar in everyday life. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions also share many common aspects, and these religions are all practiced and respected in Israel. On the other hand, the Hamas Covenant 1988 clearly calls for the killing of Jews and the obliteration of Israel.\textsuperscript{10}

For these reasons, I reject the notion that Israel's is purposely practicing genocide and scholasticide in Gaza.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 is a resolution adopted near the end of the 1947–1949 Palestine war, which neither Israel (not a UN member at the time) nor Palestine accepted.\textsuperscript{11} It calls for the negotiated return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. Article 11 of the resolution states:

\textit{refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.}

Due to the wording of this resolution, this is not an “enshrined right” and has clear stipulations as bolded above. Discussions of repatriation of refugees by Israel has been ongoing as part of various negotiations starting with the Lausanne Conference in 1949 and the Camp David Summit in 2000, but these have failed to date due to irreconcilable differences between representatives from Palestine and Israel.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625, entitled "The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States" was adopted on 24 October 1970, during a commemorative session to celebrate the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{12} It includes the statement:

\textit{the establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free association or integration with an independent State, or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitute modes of implementing the right of self-determination.}\textsuperscript{13}

The declaration also states:

\textsuperscript{9} https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-the-ethnic-composition-of-israel.html
\textsuperscript{10} https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp
\textsuperscript{11} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_General_Assembly_Resolution_194
\textsuperscript{12} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_General_Assembly_Resolution_2625
\textsuperscript{13} http://un-documents.net/a25r2625.htm
“Considering it essential that all States shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”

It is evident that the Declaration only supports peaceful modalities to resolve conflicts between nation states. A careful reading of UNGA Resolution 2625 in no way supports the notion that there is a “right to resist” as exemplified by the violent actions of Hamas on October 7th, 2023, and since then. It is therefore problematic when the signatories of the May 6th, 2024 letter at the end are calling for “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Those in Israel and Jewish people elsewhere interpret this as a threatening proclamation for the termination of their country by forced conflict.

For the above reasons, while I support the spirit of UNGA Resolution 194, after 75 years, this is unrealistic without the cooperation of the governments in Palestine and Israel. Likewise, UNGA Resolution 2625 is simply untenable with the violent actions of both Palestine and Israel towards each other and does not meet the requirements of this resolution.

The idea of UBC cutting ties with Israeli institutes runs counter the spirit of collaboration in education and research, which advances knowledge for the betterment of humankind. While many state-controlled academic institutions such as in Russia and China have limits on academic freedom of expression, this is not true in Israel. Israeli academics and students have been amongst the most vocal critics of the current Israeli government and its policies. For a small county, Israel has made an outstanding contribution to advancements in science and medicine that have been widely shared. Israeli’s have been awarded 13 Nobel Prizes, which is amongst the highest per capita in the world for any country.

It is true that UBC Senate has voted in the past to suspend collaborations with Russian universities that are state-run in view of the invasion and conflict with the Ukraine. However, Russia was clearly the aggressor in this still ongoing conflict. As a person of partial Ukrainian descent myself, I pointed out in the UBC Senate at that time that it was important to not demonize Russian people for the actions of their government. Despite active human rights abuses with the treatments of the Uyghurs in Chinese occupied East Turkestan, the UBC Senate has not taken steps to cut formal ties with Chinese universities. I also note that the genocide by starvation against Christian Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region by the Muslim Azerbaijan government last year received no attention nor protests by UBC faculty, staff and students.

It has also been suggested that UBC divest its endowment, pension fund, and other financial holdings from all companies that provide Israel with goods or services. The Social Justice Centre and UBC Graduate Students 4 Palestine cross-referenced 2023 UBC IMANT Holdings with data from the UN OHCHR, the AFSC, WhoProfits, the BDSMovement, CorpWatch, and Al-Haq to
identify 88 companies that UBC invests in which are “complicit in Israeli crimes” in 2023. UBC is claimed to have invested around $113 million of its endowment fund into these companies as detailed in a spreadsheet. Inspection of this spreadsheet reveals the following 18 companies alone that account for the $101.31 million (89.7%) of the $113 million:

Airbus S.E. - $6.57 million
General Electric Co. - $4.17 million
Safran S.A. - $3.26 million
Microsoft Corp. - $28.12 million
Alphabet Inc. - $15.31 million
Amazon - $11.24 million
Cisco Systems Inc. - $1.66 million
Hyundai - $3.26 million
Siemens A.G. - $2.55 million
Ford Motor Co. $0.92 million
HSBC Holdings P.L.C. - $7.02 million
PayPal Holdings Inc. - $1.38 million
Lululemon Athletica Inc. - $1.54 million
Walmart Inc. - $1.22 million
Booking Holdings Inc. - $8.78 million
PepsiCo. Inc. - $1.73 million
McDonald’s Corp. - $1.31 million
Coca-Cola Co. - $1.27 million

These large public companies are commonly known, diversified and providers of a wide range of consumer products to hundreds of countries. Substantial divestment from many of these companies have broad implications globally, and could hurt local businesses far greater than any impacts they would have on Israel. While certain weapons manufacturers are listed (e.g., Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, BAE Systems, General Dynamics, Airbus and Northrop Grumman), it must be appreciated that these are contractors for defense weapons in Canada, the U.S. and NATO. If protestors are calling for divestment from these 88 companies, they would do better if they simply did not purchase any of their products and services, which I suspect many of the signatories to Ms. Walia’s letter would not be willing to do.

UBC President Dr. Benoit-Antoine Bacon has stated that UBC is willing to engage on divestment, but its endowment fund does not directly own stocks in companies identified by the movement. Instead, capital, which is managed by external investment managers, is held in pooled funds which amount to about $7.8 million (0.28 percent) of the $2.8 billion endowment fund.

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14 https://www.instagram.com/p/C66uwBlMQwR/?igsh=bjB4MDB4ZnJvcDhz
15 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OjnheOeEkKY7pd4liJ_htOXiGFbOB2lR/view
16 https://ubyssey.ca/news/peoplesuniversityubc-encampment/
In view of this, I reject the notion that divestment in the companies identified by the Social Justice Centre and UBC Graduate Students 4 Palestine is warranted, and that such actions would have a real positive benefit on reducing the hostilities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To the contrary, this symbolic “virtue signaling” gesture would hurt Canada-Israeli relations and offend many others in our community.

If UBC Senate were to entertain and support the demands of those that signed the letter provided by Ms. Walia, I fear that this would further embolden discrimination against Jewish citizens within Canada, and especially British Columbia in view of the geographical location of our university. It must also be remembered that the Jewish community have been generous and strong benefactors of UBC throughout its history, and a significant number of our faculty, staff and students are Jewish. There have already been instances of anti-Jewish discrimination on other campuses across North America with the pro-Palestinian protests, and Jewish students at UBC have already filed a lawsuit against our own university with claims of anti-Semitic sentiments.17

One of the other demands of the letter was to “keep marginalized students on campus safe from police.” The UBC Campus Security and the RCMP act on behalf of everyone to maintain the peace and protect the full community. Unfortunately, the actions of many of the protestors have been disrespectful of the broader UBC community. As pointed out by Matthew Ramsey, acting senior director at UBC Media Relations “During this period, there has been theft, abuse of university property, erection of barricades, installation of cooking and toilet facilities on UBC property and the removal and possible theft of a Canadian flag from a UBC flag pole.”18 Protestors have stepped up their actions to occupy and barricade the UBC Bookstore (which required intervention by the RCMP and Campus Security), as well as occupy the Robert H. Lee Alumni Centre, the Koerner Library, the UBC President’s Office and other buildings including the Life Sciences Centre.18,19

During the nearly 50 years that I have been a student and a faculty member at UBC, I have always observed the university to be a strong supporter of free speech and academic freedom, provided that it is peaceful, respectful and definitely not hateful. I fully support the right of others to express their views. However, it is regretful that this has been abused by a relatively small number of people on our campuses with a specific agenda to promote propaganda that is hateful and disrespectful of others in our community. There does not appear to be a willingness to reasonably discuss the situation, but only the issuance of demands and threats.

18 https://www.atelier-c.eu/ceuhtml/78r80739ced46/
19 https://ubyssey.ca/news/protestors-occupy-presidents-office/