

Dear Management Team,

The AUC Student Council seeks to draw your urgent attention to the ongoing severe violations of human rights in Palestine and the problematic connections that our parent universities maintain with Israeli institutions involved in perpetrating and justifying these actions. Israel's occupation of Palestine and the systematic attempt to eradicate Palestinian culture and people has persisted for 76 years. The severity and open display of the violence perpetrated by Israel since the Al-Aqsa Flood operation necessitate that our academic institutions no longer ignore these injustices. In line with the most prominent Palestinian University, Birzeit University, we call upon our college to "fulfill their intellectual and academic duty of seeking truth, maintaining a critical distance from state-sponsored propaganda, and to hold the perpetrators of genocide and those complicit with them accountable" and immediately intervene, within the power of AUC, to stop the aggression on and war crimes against Palestinians (Birzeit University, 2023).

Israel illegally occupies Palestinian territory, amounting to a regime of settler-colonialism (UN News, 2022). This settler colonialism was and is greatly assisted by Israeli universities that are established by the Zionist movement to advance territorial goals in Palestine and the neighboring countries even prior to the creation of Israel (Newman, 2024). The Hebrew University was intended as a strategic foothold for the Zionist movement to assert a symbolic political presence in Jerusalem. Similarly, the Technion and the Weizmann Institute were created to further the scientific and technological advancement of Israel. Participating in the Nakba, the Hebrew University, Technion, and Weizmann Institute hosted the Haganah's Science Corps for military research, which resulted in the establishment of Israel's leading arms manufacturers (Newman, 2024). By annexing Palestinian territory for campuses and funding initiatives aimed at expansionist projects, academic institutions are complicit in the colonization process, and are supporting policies that discriminate against and exclude Palestinians. In the West Bank, Ariel University, which was established on stolen property, is used as a vehicle for annexation, turning illegal settlements into suburbs (Israeli Academics for Peace, n.d.). Here, the academic disciplines offered contribute to the realization of Zionist goals and to the militarization of the youth, since the Israeli state and military control what is being taught.

Now, based on comprehensive reports from human rights organizations, eyewitness accounts from journalists, and coverage from major global news outlets, there is substantial evidence of Israel's actions constituting potential genocide. The International Court of Justice in The Hague has deemed the accusations of genocide against Israel

plausible. Israel's stated intent to depopulate Gaza either through killing or displacement is explicit and alarming (Segal & Green, 2024). Some of the criminal acts perpetrated by Israel and brought before the International Court of Justice include:

1. Maintaining apartheid, i.e., a legal framework that explicitly makes people second class citizens based on their ethnicity and denies them basic human rights (Amnesty International, 2022).
2. The deliberate killing of many thousands of Palestinian civilians (Gaviria Betancur, 2023).
3. The targeted killing of Palestinian journalists (Mwatana, 2023).
4. The mass removal of basic necessities for human life, first and foremost food and medicine, from Palestinians (Human Rights Watch, 2024).
5. The targeted destruction of the Gaza Strip's internal food production (Human Rights Watch, 2024).
6. The targeted destruction of hospitals and preventing their functioning by other means (AJLabs and Sanad Verification Agency, 2024).
7. Targeted destruction of educational institutions, archives, libraries, and other sites of cultural heritage (UN News, 2024).
8. The forced migration of the population to so-called "safe zones" which were then also extensively bombed (Gaviria Betancur, 2023).
9. Destroying most of the houses in the Gaza Strip, making the area uninhabitable (UNDP, 2024).
10. Creating conditions that will lead to massive amounts of surplus deaths (UNDP, 2024).

Both the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Vrije Universiteit (VU) maintain ties with Israeli institutions built on stolen land and in collaboration with the Israeli Defense Force (Stop Wapenhandel, 2023). They participate in EU programs such as Horizon Europe, Horizon 2020, and Framework Programme 7, which include collaborations with major Israeli arms companies (Elbit, Israel Aerospace Industries, and Rafael), the Israeli Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Public Security (ECCP, 2015; ECCP, 2016; CORDIS, n.d.). These programs also involve universities that cooperate with the Israeli military and are located in illegal Israeli settlements. The VU has not been transparent with their ties to universities otherwise. The UvA collaborates with three major Israeli universities: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv University (UvA, 2024). These universities are deeply integrated into the Israeli state apparatus and have direct links to the military. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for instance, is located in occupied East Jerusalem and hosts an IDF military academy on its

campus (Academia for Equality, 2021). It has also named Michael Federmann, owner of the arms manufacturer Elbit Systems, as honorary chairman (Investigate, n.d.). Ben-Gurion University and Tel Aviv University similarly have military training programs and collaborations with the Israeli armed forces (Rapoport, 2023; Sen, 2021). These connections highlight the role of Israeli academic institutions in supporting military operations and the occupation of Palestinian territories. As such, these collaborations contribute to the realization of Zionist goals, by supporting the annexation of Palestinian territory for campuses, funding expansionist projects, contributing to its propaganda, and aiding the development of weapons and military doctrines used in Palestine and Lebanon.

We are aware that the rectors of multiple Dutch universities, including those of VU and UvA, have released an open letter regarding the call for an academic boycott, stating that "we see no reason to reconsider or break ties," using academic freedom as their primary argument. This stance has been criticized as naive by many educators and students who point out it is impossible to uphold the fundamental value of freedom without actively identifying and addressing those who infringe upon it (Harmsen, 2024). There are severe restrictions on academic freedom within Israel itself (Butler, 2006). Palestinian scholars and students face significant barriers, including restrictions on movement, limited access to resources, and direct interference from the state. True dialogue and academic exchange are impossible when one party operates under a regime that systematically suppresses the academic freedoms of others. Thus, engaging in academic partnerships with institutions complicit in these practices contradicts the very essence of academic freedom and perpetuates inequality and injustice. By resisting and suppressing calls to sever ties with Israeli institutions, universities endorse a version of academic inquiry devoid of factual rigor, where even grave accusations of genocide are relegated to mere opinions. Such a stance fundamentally undermines the core principles of academic integrity and the relentless pursuit of truth, both of which are integral to the mission of higher education institutions. This position not only compromises the ethical foundations of academia but also diminishes the role of universities as bastions of critical thought and social responsibility.

Moreover, academic universities often pride themselves on their independence from governmental influences. Thus, when universities claim they are awaiting directives from higher authorities before taking action, it exposes this as a convenient excuse rather than a legitimate reason. This reliance on external commands contradicts the ethos of academic independence and responsibility. Universities have the autonomy and moral obligation to make decisions that align with their ethical values and commitments to social justice, irrespective of governmental directives.

Past actions by UvA and VU demonstrate their capacity to take ethical stands against states violating international law. In 1974, VU severed ties with apartheid South Africa, and in 2020, UvA cut ties with Russia after its invasion of Ukraine (Kamsteeg & Wels, 2017; UvA, 2022). These precedents give the impression that when desired, the universities can and will take action when necessary, and it is crucial to understand that these actions are important for the developments of the conflicts at hand.

Unlike VU and UvA, international academic communities have shown overwhelming support for an academic boycott against Israel. Some months ago now, five Norwegian universities terminated all cooperation with Israeli academic institutions due to their ties to the Israeli military and illegal settlements (BDS Movement, 2024). Notable examples include OsloMet, the University of South Eastern Norway, the University of Bergen, and the Bergen School of Architecture. These institutions ended collaborations with Israeli universities and colleges involved with the military and illegal settlements, setting a precedent for academic institutions worldwide. Similarly, Ghent University in Belgium has decided to end all ongoing institutional collaborations with Israeli universities and research institutions following an evaluation by its Committee on Human Rights Policy and Dual Use Research (Flanders News, 2024). On May 10, the Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten also announced the end of its collaborations with the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, making it the first Dutch academic institution to sever ties (Lawson-Tancred, 2024). These actions are motivated by the recognition of the significant human rights abuses committed by Israel and the need for universities to uphold ethical standards.

Since AUC is a program under both UvA and VU and receives funding from these parent universities, AUC shares the problematic ties with Israeli institutions and has a responsibility to do anything in its power to intervene in actions that violate human rights, which can plausibly be considered genocide under international law. While the Student Council recognizes that AUC does not have the authority to sever these ties directly, we strongly urge that AUC support and pressure its parent universities into an academic boycott, as proposed by the CSR and FGw at UvA and by SRVU at VU, to show solidarity with Palestine and the AUC student body's demand for justice. Cutting ties with Israeli academic institutions is a critical stance against and an effort to end collaboration with entities that legitimize, rationalize, and normalize colonization and genocidal acts. In line with this, we strongly recommend that AUC to issue a formal statement urging the VU and UvA to take concrete actions consistent with their stated decolonial and justice-oriented principles.

We urge AUC to support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement to the fullest extent possible. The BDS movement is a global campaign that promotes various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law, including ending its occupation and colonization of Arab lands, ensuring full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and respecting the right of return for Palestinian refugees (BDS Movement, 2017). For instance, ensuring that the cafeteria does not sell products listed by the BDS movement would be a practical step towards fulfilling this commitment. Institutional values should transcend mere rhetoric and marketing strategies; they must be deeply meaningful and intrinsically linked to proactive institutional behaviors and policies. It is imperative for academic institutions to embody these values through tangible actions that reflect their commitment to social justice and ethical responsibility.

In conclusion, the current humanitarian crisis in Palestine demands immediate attention from academia. The documented crimes by Israel, including the targeting of journalists, civilians, and cultural institutions, cannot be overlooked. Our universities' indirect connections to Israeli institutions involved in these crimes make us complicit in the subjugation of Palestinian people. Calls for an academic boycott are essential steps toward justice and accountability. Given the successful historical boycott campaigns against apartheid governments, we advise AUC to incentivize both parent universities to sever ties with organizations that support colonialism and violence. We have a moral duty to act against injustice and uphold human rights principles, standing in solidarity with global voices calling for change.

Sincerely,

Student Council 2023-2024

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