

War on Gaza – Targeting civilians, including school and university students and members of administrative and teaching staff

Devastating Impact on Educational Institutions amid Israel's declared war in Gaza Strip

The Statement of the Human Rights Committee of Palestine Academy for Science and Technology - 25th October 2023

Israel's declared war on Gaza Strip has wrought havoc on all aspects of life for the Palestinians, with clear violation of international law and human rights conventions. The educational system has been affected severely by the ongoing war leaving an indelible scar that will mar generations to come. Schools, and universities were targeted and damaged along with whole neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble, leaving entire families annihilated; The total number of housing units reported as destroyed or damaged accounts for at least 45 per cent of all housing units in the Gaza Strip. Over half a million Palestinians have been deliberately displaced, with calls to deport another million from the northern sector of the Strip. Overall, 6,547, of whom 68 per cent are children and women. About 1,600 people, including 900 children, have been reported missing and may be under the rubble.

As of 25 October, 219 educational facilities have been hit, including at least 29 UNRWA schools. Eight of these schools were used as emergency shelters for displaced Palestinians, with one of them being directly hit, resulting in at least eight killed, and 40 others injured. On October 9, 2023, Israel escalated its war crimes by bombing the Islamic University of Gaza, causing catastrophic damage to all its buildings and resulting in significant loss of life. The assault has left the university's infrastructure in ruins, extending beyond structural damage to the loss of invaluable equipment, laboratories, and furniture. Al-Azhar University has also suffered extensive damage in Israel's indiscriminate carpet bombing. The long-term ramifications of this war on Gaza's higher education system are incalculable. The extensive destruction of educational infrastructure—libraries, laboratories, classrooms—and the tragic loss of life among faculty, technicians, staff, and students will exacerbate an already beleaguered educational system, crippled by 16 years of blockade. The psychological, intellectual, and cultural fabric necessary for a thriving academic community has been torn asunder, and it will take years, if not generations, to mend.

The 16-year blockade on Gaza enclave has already stifled the intellectual growth of Palestinian academics, restricting their inward and outward mobility imposed by the Israeli occupation both Gaza and the West Bank, hindering the development of essential infrastructure for teaching, learning, and research. This blockade has severed Gaza from the West Bank, obliterating opportunities for collaborative research and teaching among faculty and students. It has also restricted the mobility of foreign students and faculty, barring them from attending Palestinian universities in Gaza, thereby thwarting these institutions from fulfilling their academic missions. In essence, the blockade has transformed Gaza into an intellectual and educational prison, stifling any form of intellectual and cultural exchange.

The international community must act decisively to hold Israel accountable for its egregious violations of international law and human rights, and to ensure that the Palestinian people achieve their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state.

The global academic community bears an intellectual and moral duty to seek the truth and to intervene immediately to halt aggression. They must protect the Palestinians from this onslaught of war crimes and crimes against humanity and put an end to the ethnic cleansing in all of Palestine.