

## ATTENTION EDITORS

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 06.00 TUESDAY OCTOBER 27th**

### **“We will not work with Israel’s universities” say 340 UK academics.**

- In an unprecedented statement university teachers say they will not do business with Israel’s university institutions and system.
- Professors and lecturers, Fellows of the Royal Society and Fellows of the British Academy say they will not visit Israel’s universities.
- Academics from across 72 different institutions have made the Commitment, more expected to follow as campaign grows.
- Full page advertisement in *The Guardian* newspaper announces launch of the Commitment.
- Israeli universities are “deeply complicit” with Israeli violations of international law.

A commitment signed by 343 academics across UK’s higher education system says they will not accept invitations for academic visits to Israel. They will not act as referees in activities related to Israel academic institutions, or cooperate in any other way with Israeli universities

This Academic Commitment is a response to the appeal for such action by Palestinian academics and civil society due to the deep complicity of Israeli academic institutions in Israeli violations of international law. Signatories have pledged to continue their commitment until Israel complies with international law, and respects Palestinian human rights.

The need for solidarity with the Palestinian people, as expressed in the Academic Commitment, is made more urgent today by the current escalation of violent conflict in Israel/Palestine. The fatalities are overwhelmingly of Palestinians engaging in street protests provoked by Israel’s 48-year and ever tightening occupation. Palestinians are driven to desperation in the face of Israeli intransigence, and its continuing ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem.

According to Professor Conor Gearty, Professor of Human Rights Law at London School of Economics “As a State that aspires to live by the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, Israel needs urgently to change its behavior so far as its Palestinian citizens and those Palestinians under its control are concerned. This boycott is a small way of saying a big thing: that fairness and justice should be for real and not just for show, that all international laws must be respected, not only those that happen to be convenient”.

Speaking for the organisers of the Academic Commitment Professor Jonathan Rosenhead (London School of Economics) said "Israeli universities are at the heart of Israel's violations of international law and oppression of the Palestinian people. These signatures were all collected despite the pressures that can be put on people not to criticise the state of Israel. Now that the invitation to join the Commitment is in the public domain, we anticipate many more to join us."

"Israel's ongoing oppression of Palestinians has led tens of thousands of Palestinians to take to the streets in mass protest and is causing a sea change in attitudes towards Israel across the UK university sector. We will be conducting a campaign across the country's universities over the coming months, and inviting fellow academics to contact us if they wish to sign the commitment".

Professor Jane Hardy, Professor of Global Political Economy at the University of Hertfordshire gave her reasons for signing in this way:

"This is an opportunity for academics to add their voices to the growing international movement to hold Israel accountable for its human rights abuses and specifically the deprivation of opportunity for our Palestinian colleagues to participate in the global academic community. The commitment does not call for the termination of links with individual colleagues nor the end of dialogue, rather it is a boycott of institutions directly or indirectly complicit in the systematic and illegal occupation of Palestine."

Professor Malcolm Levitt FRS, a chemist at the University of Southampton explained why he signed the Commitment: "For decades Israel has enjoyed special protection and privileges despite its blatantly illegal occupation and settlement policy. This privileged status has lured Israel into a dead end, with consequences that are becoming increasingly apparent to everyone. In the face of the silence and complicity of our elected representatives, individuals must exert pressure as best as they can. This commitment allows me, as an academic, to collaborate with Israeli individuals in the best scientific traditions, while still resisting the attempt by Israeli institutions to normalise their complicity in grossly illegal and unjust activities."

Echoing these sentiments, Dr. Rachel Cohen of City University said, "It is the responsibility of those of us who have the freedom to act to exercise that freedom in support of our colleagues in Palestinian universities who do not have such freedom. The Israeli state presents itself as an enlightened funder of academic pursuits, and yet it systematically denies Palestinian academics and students their basic freedoms, such as the freedom of movement necessary to attend international academic conferences, or simply to get to lectures on time."

Professor Costas Lapavitsas of the School of Oriental and African Studies, and recent deputy in the Greek parliament, declared, "The Palestinian people continue to show remarkable determination in fighting for their national rights. The action by UK scholars is a small gesture of support and a way of reminding Israel that the arrogance of strength is a bad and dangerous principle for any state to adopt."

Last week, 150 miscellaneous writers, broadcasters, conservative MPs and others, some distinguished, the others less so, produced a joint statement opposing the cultural boycott pledge in support of Palestinian rights that was launched last February by 1000 cultural workers. The very publication of this attempted counter-blast by Israel's friends, the delay in assembling its list of celebrities, and its padding out by those with little or no involvement in culture, indicate both the power and the public resonance of civil society initiatives aimed at isolating Israel.

## **Notes for editors:**

### 1. Text of the Academic Commitment:

#### *A Commitment by UK scholars to the rights of Palestinians*

*As scholars associated with British universities, we are deeply disturbed by Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land, the intolerable human rights violations that it inflicts on all sections of the Palestinian people, and its apparent determination to resist any feasible settlement.*

*Responding to the appeal from Palestinian civil society, we therefore declare that we will not:*

- *accept invitations to visit Israeli academic institutions;*
- *act as referees in any of their processes;*
- *participate in conferences funded, organised or sponsored by them, or otherwise cooperate with them.*

*We will, however, continue to work with our Israeli colleagues in their individual capacities. We will maintain this position until the State of Israel complies with international law, and respects universal principles of human rights.*

### 2. Signatories

All signatures are in personal capacities.

Academics signing the Academic Commitment are drawn from across the spectrum of disciplines: for example Anthropology, Art, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Classics, Cultural Studies, Design History, History, Information Systems, Law, Linguistics, Management Science, Mathematics, Medicine, Music, Pharmacology, Philosophy, Physics, Political Science, Population Studies, Psychology, Translation Studies, Zoology. This list is illustrative only.

Leading figures who have signed the Academic Commitment include:

Professor Sir Patrick Bateson FRS of University of Cambridge

Dr. Rachel Cohen of City University London

Professor Larry Dreyfus of Oxford University

Professor Jane Hardy of University of Hertfordshire

Professor Conor Gearty of London School of Economics  
Professor Dorothy Griffiths of Imperial College London  
Professor Penny Green of Queen Mary University of London  
Professor Susan Himmelweit of Open University  
Professor Ted Honderich of University College London  
Professor Sir Tom Kibble FRS of Imperial College London  
Professor Malcolm Levitt FRS of University of Southampton  
Professor Sara Mills of Sheffield Hallam University  
Professor Catherine Moriarty of University of Brighton  
Dr. Gabriela Sandalha of University of Birmingham  
Professor Stella Sandford of University of Kingston  
Professor Richard Sennett of the London School of Economics  
Professor Tim Shallice FRS, FBA of University College London  
Professor Julian Stallabrass of the Courtauld Institute of Art  
Dr. Alberto Toscano, Goldsmiths College  
The full list is available at [www.commitment4P.com](http://www.commitment4P.com)

### 3. Background to the Commitment

This initiative from critics of Israel in UK universities is a decisive new step in the development of the worldwide movement to hold Israel, and its institutions, responsible for its violations of international law and discrimination against its Palestinian citizens. Previous well supported statements criticising Israel's policies have been signed by large numbers of academic scholars. This is the first in which the signatories have committed themselves personally to disengage from Israel's university institutions.

The call for academic sanction against Israeli academic institutions was first made in 2004 by the Palestinian Campaign for the Cultural and Academic Boycott of Israel (PACBI). The call can be found at <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>. Modelling itself on the international campaign to isolate Apartheid South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, this Palestinian initiative constituted a new and non-violent strategy for the liberation of Palestinians from oppression.

A full statement of the case for an academic boycott is available in the booklet *Why Boycott Israel's Universities?* published by the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine – see <http://www.bricup.org.uk/documents/WhyBoycottIsraeliUniversities.pdf>

### 4. Examples of complicity of Israeli universities with Israeli violations of international law

Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology, has [developed](#) weaponised unmanned bulldozers used to demolish Palestinian homes, and has created special technology to detect tunnels that Palestinians use to break the illegal siege on Gaza.

The Ben Gurion University [conducts research](#) underpinning the on-going existence and deepening of discrimination within Israel's water system, under which Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank have almost unlimited access to water while many Palestinians are left with just a trickle.

An institute at Tel Aviv University [was responsible](#) for developing the so-called "doctrine of disproportionate force" and the targeting of civilian infrastructure that informed military planning in the 2008-09 and 2014 assaults on Gaza during which war crimes were committed.

The Hebrew University has [participated](#) in the confiscation of Palestinian land as it has expanded into occupied Palestinian territory; some of the university's student accommodation is located in an illegal Israeli settlement.

In 2011, the University of Johannesburg [cut ties](#) with Ben Gurion University and ended a research project on water.

#### 5. Cultural Boycott

Closely related to the Academic Commitment is the Cultural Boycott Pledge launched in February 2015 and signed by over 1000 UK artists across the fields of culture. Signatories included actors Julie Christie and Mark Rylance; playwrights David Edgar and Trevor Griffiths; film makers Ken Loach and Mike Leigh; writers Jacqueline Rose and Gillian Slovo; artist and writer John Berger; comedians Jeremy Hardy and Alexei Sayle; poets Liz Lochhead and Benjamin Zephaniah; poet and musician Kate Tempest; and musicians Jarvis Cocker and Brian Eno.

This pledge was promoted by the new organisation Artists for Palestine UK. The details of this pledge and its signatories can be found at <http://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/> . See also APUK's booklet *The Case for a Cultural Boycott of Israel*, which is available via their website.