



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

3700 O St. NW, ICC Suite 241 | Washington, DC 20057
520-333-2577 | secretariat@mesana.org | mesana.org

12 September 2024

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Kamala Harris
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear President Biden, Vice-President Harris, Secretary of State Blinken, and Secretary of Defense Austin,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) and the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to vehemently condemn the government of Israel's brutal and cruel military campaign against the Palestinian people of Gaza and beseech you to urgently insist upon its immediate cessation. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health - Gaza, the death toll of Gazan Palestinians from Israeli attacks from 7 October 2023 until 9 September 2024 reached a shocking 40,972, with at least 94,761 wounded and untold numbers of dead who remain beneath the rubble. In this letter, as in our last two letters to Israeli government officials ([25 January 2024](#); [21 November 2023](#)), we focus on the decimation of the education sector in the Gaza Strip through the military's killing of students, faculty, and staff and its targeted destruction of schools, university buildings, and related facilities. We are especially concerned to underscore the magnitude of the decimation by identifying by name and affiliation as many of the murdered Gazan scholars as is possible at this time.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes *the International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring

academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Over the past 11 months, the unprecedented extent of death and destruction wrought by Israel's war on Gaza has devastated the educational sector. According to the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), more than 625,000 students—90,000 of whom are university students—and close to 23,000 teachers have been impacted by attacks on educational facilities and school closures. All remain without access to formal education or even a safe place to shelter.

According to the UN in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, as of 8 September 2024, more than 10,000 students and 411 educational staff have been killed, while more than 15,394 students and 2,411 teachers have been injured since 7 October ([OCHA, Humanitarian Situation Update #215, Gaza Strip, 9 September 2024](#)). Moreover, 90 percent of school buildings have been damaged, and 85 percent of educational facilities are “out of service due to direct and deliberate targeting” ([OCHA, Gaza Humanitarian Response Update, 22 July–4 August 2024](#)). Within the first 100 days of the onslaught, all major universities were destroyed [see our letter [25 January 2024](#)]. To date, numerous colleges and technical institutes have been severely damaged, if not destroyed. The physical infrastructure necessary for higher education—including laboratories, libraries, classrooms, the latest technologies, etc.—no longer exists. Furthermore, in the absence of (reliable) electricity, internet connectivity and even phone reception, even remote instruction is extremely challenging, if not practically impossible.

As for primary and secondary education, 191 schools, including those run by UNRWA, have been bombed or vandalized. UNRWA, for one, has reported that no official schooling is available at any of its 200 schools. While 119 government schools have been heavily damaged, more than 62 have been completely destroyed. Many schools that have served to shelter internally displaced Palestinians, either because of the destruction of their homes or because of (repeated) evacuation orders, are among those facilities that have been destroyed, if not severely damaged, leading to the deaths of many of those taking shelter. Recent examples include: incidents on 6 and 7 September, when a tent housing internally displaced persons in Halima Al Sadia School in Jabalya Camp and a prayer hall inside Amr Ibn Al Aas school in Gaza city were hit; the targeting of a school in Deir el-Balah on 20 August, a school in Gaza City on 10 August ([OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update #203, 12 Aug 2024](#)) and two on 8 August ([OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update #202, 9 August 2024](#)), causing tremendous loss of life. Just the week before, four schools serving as shelters were attacked. Indeed, according to an assessment conducted by UNICEF, OCHA and Save the Children, 53% of schools used as shelters — amounting to some 190 — have been directly and deliberately hit by Israel's military in the last 11 months.

In addition to the massive destruction of Gaza's physical educational infrastructure — the rebuilding of which will require many years and billions of dollars — the systematic killing of our Palestinian colleagues in Gaza needs to be highlighted. Scholars from across the humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields, widely respected by their peers and students, have been targeted and murdered. These academics represented the intellectual leadership of the Palestinian community in Gaza and were the foundation for the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge.

Various organizations have been documenting the Israeli military's killing of Palestinian scholars and university professors. As a precise accounting is obstructed by the ongoing attacks and insecurity, we provide below only a partial list of the names and, where possible, academic affiliations of those scholars who have been killed. These individuals represent a very small

percentage of those who have been integral to higher education and intellectual life in the Gaza Strip and have been catastrophically affected by death and suffering: the hundreds of faculty and staff and thousands of students and their families who have been killed in military assaults, bombings, or through prolonged exposure to starvation and disease since 7 October 2023.

University Presidents:

Professor Sufyan Tayeh, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Said Al-Zibda, University College of Applied Sciences
Professor Muhammad Eid Shabir, former President, Islamic University of Gaza

Deans:

Dean Ibrahim al-Astal, Islamic University of Gaza
Dean Khitam Al-Wasifi, Islamic University of Gaza
Dean Mahmoud Abu Daf, Islamic University of Gaza
Dean Omar Farwanah, Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of Gaza
Dean Taysir Ibrahim, Faculty of Shari'a and Law, Islamic University of Gaza
Dean Nasser Abu Al-Nour, Faculty of Nursing, Islamic University of Gaza
Dean Ahmed Abu Absa, University of Palestine
Dean Ahmed Al-Dalu, University of Palestine
Dean Naim Baroud, Faculty of Arts, Islamic University of Gaza

Professors and academic staff (listed in groups by institutional affiliation):

Professor Adham Hassouna, Al-Aqsa University
Professor Ahmad Mahmoud al-Qara, Al-Aqsa University
Professor Nesma Abu Shaqra, Al-Aqsa University
Professor Abdel-Nasir Al-Saqqa, Al-Aqsa University
Professor Nidal Qaddura, Al-Aqsa University
Professor Wiesam Essa, Al-Aqsa University
Professor Fadil Abu Hain, Al-Aqsa University
Dr. Mohamad Hammad, lecturer in Business, Al-Aqsa University
Yahya Ghabban, lecturer, Faculty of Arts, Al-Aqsa University

Professor Jihad Al-Masri, Al-Quds Open University
Professor Hassan Kafarneh, Al-Quds Open University
Professor Muhammed Atef Awad, Al-Quds Open University
Professor Muhammad Al-Nabahin, Al-Quds Open University

Professor Ibrahim Barhoum Abu Salah, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Prof Mohammad Bakheit, Islamic University of Gaza
Islam Suleiman Haboush, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Midhat Saidem, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Nahed Al-Rafati, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Refaat AlAreer, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Mohammed Awad, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Rizq Arruq, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Azzu Affanah, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Education, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Muhammad Bakhit, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Salem Abu-Mukhdah, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Muhammad Dabbour Assad, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Nasir Al-Yafawi, Islamic University of Gaza

Professor Sharif Al-Assali, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Youssef al-Kahlout, Arabic Language & Literature, Islamic University of Gaza
Rahaf Hanideq, lecturer, Islamic University of Gaza
Professor Mohamad Abu Al-Saeed, Islamic University of Gaza
Dr. Hossam Hamada, Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of Gaza
Amin Dabbour, Professor of Political Science, Islamic University of Gaza
Dr. Mohammad Dabbour, cancer pathologist and head of the preclinical department, College of Medicine, Islamic University of Gaza
Dr. Adnan Ahmad Al-Barsh, Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of Gaza
Mohamad Al-Bakhiet, Islamic University of Gaza

Professor Amin Al-Bahtiti, Al-Azhar University of Gaza
Bassam Shahin, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Intermediate Studies, Al Azhar University

Professor Ali Al-Qirinawi, University of Palestine
Professor Ibrahim Saidam, University of Palestine
Professor Mustafa Al-Laqta, University of Palestine
Professor Mustafa Al-Naqib, University of Palestine
Anas Al-Bursh, lecturer, Faculty of Law, University of Palestine

Director Tareq Thabet, University College of Applied Sciences
Professor Shaher Yaghi, University College of Applied Sciences
Professor Wael Al-Zard, University College of Applied Sciences

Professor Mohamad Abd Al-Ghuffur, Islamic Da'wah College

Marwan Tarazi, Director, Center for Continuing Education at Birzeit University, Gaza office

Do'a Al-Masri, librarian and researcher, Edward Said Library

Faculty, academic staff and researchers (institutional affiliation incomplete):

Dr. Ziad Tatri, researcher in Neonatology and lecturer
Dr. Mohamad Adwan, professor of Medicine
Shahidah Al-Bahbani, poet and writer
Abd Al-Karim Hashash, historian, researcher, writer
Rola Fadl Abd Al-Jawad, professor of Multimedia
Muhamad Fayez al-Najjar, professor of Engineering
Hassan Al-Rafid, researcher, writer, lecturer in Economics

Dr. Rafet Lobad
Professor Khalil Abu Yahya
Dr. Maisara Al-Rayyes
Professor Sreen Al-Attar
Professor Usama Al-Muzayni
Professor Ismail Abu Sa'adah
Professor Khaled Al-Ramlawi
Professor Said Al-Dahshan
Professor Raed Qaddura
Professor Muhammad Abu-Zur
Professor Yusuf Juma'a Salameh

Professor Nida Affanah
Professor Mu'min Shuwaydah
Professor Siddiq Nassar
Professor Ahmad Abu Saadah
Professor Jamilah Al-Shanti
Professor Muhamamd Jamil Za'anin
Professor Ismail Al-Ghamri
Professor Walid Al-Amudi
Professor Abdullah Al-Amudi
Professor Hassan Al-Radi'
Professor Muhammad Abu Amara
Professor Mahmud Al-Loh
Professor Khalid Al-Najjar
Professor Muhammad Al-Najjar
Professor Muhammad Hassounah
Professor Yasir Radwan
Professor Jihad Al-Baz
Professor Hazem Al-Jamali
Professor Muhammad Nassar
Professor Essam Al-Lulu

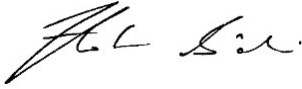
In our letters to Israeli government officials regarding the current war on Gaza [[25 January 2024](#); [21 Nov 2023](#)], we insisted that as the occupying authority, Israel's targeting of the Palestinian educational sector buildings through bombings and other forms of aggression constituted a violation of the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#) of 1949, relating to the protection of civilians in time of war. The government and military's resultant obstruction of education has also been a clear violation of the right to education enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The right to education is binding under all circumstances and to be protected in all situations, including during crises and emergencies resulting from civil strife and [war](#). Israel is a party to the UDHR and a signatory to the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them. We remind you that as a party to the Geneva Conventions and as a leading supporter of international human rights law, the United States also bears a substantial responsibility to ensure that countries like Israel that receive substantial financial and military support from the United States observe their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.

The massive assaults against educational infrastructure, educators and students at all levels and throughout Gaza since 7 October are part and parcel of a larger, deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing intended to destroy the very foundations and bases of continued Palestinian life in Gaza, in violation of all of Israel's legal obligations and, indeed, in violation of basic precepts of humanity. See summaries and statements of the International Court of Justice [19 July 2024](#), [24 May 2024](#); MESA letter [11 March 2024](#).

We heed the call of our esteemed Palestinian colleagues in Gaza ([Open letter 29 May 2024](#)) to support them as they resist the brutal military onslaught and strive to continue to teach their students and rebuild their education sector. We urge the United States' Government to demand an immediate and permanent cease-fire and the total withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the Gaza Strip – indeed, the termination of the genocidal violence against the Palestinian people.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Aslı Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School



Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Ambassador to the UN
Samantha Power, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development
Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister, Government of Canada
Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Canada
Josep Borrell-Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer - Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), European Parliament
Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament
Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights
Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories
Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories
James Heenan, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ramallah
The Honorable Veronica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, MENA section
Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders
Farida Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education
Cheikh Niang, Chair of UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
Ajith Sunghay, Head of Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory
Noha Bawazir, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative, UNESCO Liaison Office, Ramallah, Palestinian delegation to UNESCO