

A call for global actions on academic justice in Gaza

Shahed Khafaji¹, Muhammad Naveed Noor², Sujith Kumar Prankumar^{3,4}, Irene Torres⁵ and Mohammed Alkhalidi^{6,7,8}

¹School of Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, United Kingdom. ²Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan. ³The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. ⁴Nottingham Law School, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, United Kingdom. ⁵Fundacion Octaedro, Quito, Ecuador. ⁶Department of Public Health, Canadian University Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. ⁷School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University, Canada. ⁸Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom (Correspondence to Mohammed Alkhalidi: Mohammed.alkhalidi@mcgill.ca).

Keywords: academic, university, education, scientific community, Gaza

Citation: Khafaji S Noor MN, Prankumar SK, Torres I, Alkhalidi M. A call for global actions on academic justice in Gaza. *East Mediterr Health J.* 2025;31(4):295–297. <https://doi.org/10.26719/2025.31.4.295>.

Received: 04/11/2024; Accepted: 25/03/2025

Copyright © Authors 2025; Licensee: World Health Organization. EMHJ is an open-access journal. This paper is available under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo>).

Universities have historically held and created cultural and scientific knowledge, bearing social and moral duty to serve societies, advocate for justice and provide learning opportunities without suppression. Academics, as witnesses of social and political events, strive to interpret the world and foster intellectual debate. Across time, scholars and students have stood against injustice and oppression.

For decades, Israeli occupation and political instability in Gaza have devastated the social system of Palestinians, severely disrupting health, education and research (1). Since 7 October 2023, Gaza's situation has worsened. As of September 2024, more than 41 000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 95 000 injured (2). The deaths are linked to military action, restricted access to fresh food and water, collapsed healthcare system, resulting in starvation and the spread of infectious diseases (2–4,20). Numerous scholars and organisations, including humanitarian and human rights groups, have condemned the violence, emphasising the devastating impact on civilians, especially women and children.

Gaza's academic infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, including all universities, with hundreds of staff and at least 11 000 students killed (5,6). On 17 January 2024, Israa University, the last university in Gaza, was destroyed, bringing Gaza's education system to a total collapse (5). This devastation endangers future generations of Palestinians, leading to trauma, deprivation and uncertainty.

Scholars in Gaza have requested aid to urgently restore their scientific infrastructure weakened by bombardment and resource restrictions (7,8), emphasising the need for international solidarity to rebuild and protect academic freedom. However, the call is yet to yield tangible response (9,10).

Response by the global scientific community to Israel's attacks on civilians and civil organizations, including scholars, staff and students, as well as academic and educational facilities in Gaza, has generally been weak and lacking the required impact. Despite some vocal appeals for action, the overall

influence has been minimal (11,12). A scoping review by Shekhani and Jafarey on the bioethics response to the Gaza conflict found only 15 articles published across top bioethics journals, a stark contrast to the swift responses denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine (13). Researchers suggest that this limited response may be due to fears of criticism or because Gaza's plight is not prioritized by journal editors. One author of this article experienced this bias when leading medical journals requested the removal of terms like “horrific,” “tightened blockade,” and “mass killing” in an article on Gaza's health system. Although scientists are expected to uphold impartiality, morality, and integrity, these values should not dilute or romanticize the harsh realities that Palestinians face.

The limited response by the academic community may be due to the fear of backlash or funding loss (14). Academics and students at leading universities around the world have protested Gaza's situation, often risking personal and financial security. However, institutional pushbacks, combined with insufficient political and public support for universal human rights, has stifled global academic support. Some governments and organizations have responded to Palestinian solidarity movements with hostility, breaking up advocacy efforts. The challenges of supporting science and education in a region like Gaza are immense (15). As a result, efforts by the scientific community have failed to translate into any meaningful influence including a ceasefire.

For the global scientific community to amplify its impact, a more unified and proactive approach is essential. First, ending double standards is crucial. Many universities have condemned Russia's actions and severed ties with Russian institutions, but Gaza's crisis remains unaddressed (16). In the United Kingdom, authorities have attempted to criminalise the display of the Palestinian flag including on university campuses (17). Similarly, universities in the United States of America have cracked down on student-led pro-Palestinian protests, instilling fear in individuals and institutions wishing to speak out (20). This suppression of academic voices has contributed to weakened support for Gaza and other parts of Palestine.

Second, bridging the global north and south divide is vital through collaborations among universities, scientific associations and non-government institutions to ensure that underrepresented voices are heard. The scientific community should intensify advocacy, leveraging its influence to pressure policymakers to protect scientific institutions and academic rights in conflict zones. Journal publishers should remain committed to open debate and diverse knowledge sharing about the issue. Censoring voices within such avenues of knowledge and learning can be seen as complicity in the violation of human rights. Collaborative initiatives, such as the University of Northampton's Academics4Gaza programme, which connects students in Gaza to academics abroad, should be supported and expanded (18). Scientists and institutions must overcome the fear of backlash and speak out more forcefully against the incessant attacks, much like their response to other global conflicts.

Universities and academics play a critical role in exposing injustice and fostering peace. Fair and open dialogue is essential for developing knowledge that informs decision-making regarding the Gaza conflict. The global scientific community can champion the rights of oppressed populations worldwide, particularly in Palestine. Rethinking the role of the global scientific community is imperative. Academic entities should embody morality, integrity and fairness to marginalized communities like Palestinians, who have endured long and intense periods of injustice (19). Forming a global alliance to address this and similar issues among scientific organizations, with clear and collective vision for advocacy, accountability and support, is a priority (19).

Funding: None.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

References

- AlKhaldi M, Alkaiyat A, Abed Y, Pfeiffe, C, Halaseh R, Salah R, et al. The Palestinian health research system: who orchestrates the system, how and based on what? A qualitative assessment. *Health Res Pol Sys*. 2018;16(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-018-0347-4>.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Gaza Strip. Reported Impact Snapshot, 18 September 2024. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-18-september-2024>.
- Hussein S, Ahmed SK, Qurbani K, Fareeq A, Essa RA. Infectious diseases threat amidst the war in Gaza. *J Med, Surg Public Health* 2024;2:100067.
- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. UN experts deeply concerned over 'scholasticide' in Gaza. Press Release, 18 April 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>.
- Middle East Monitor. 11,000 Palestinian students killed since 7 October. Middle East Monitor, September 18, 2024. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240918-11000-palestinian-students-killed-since-7-october/>.
- International Science Council. Supporting at-risk and displaced Palestinian scientists: offers of assistance. News, 29 July 2024. <https://council.science/news/supporting-at-risk-and-displaced-palestinian-scientists/>.
- Palestinian Academy for Science and Technology. Science in ruins: Gaza's scientists call for global support. News, 30 July 2024. https://www.palast.ps/en/news/science-ruins-gazas-scientists-call-global-support-blog-international-science-council-isc?language_content_entity=en.
- Slimia N. The double standards of western countries toward Ukraine and Palestine "Western Hypocrisy". *Mid East Inter J Soc Sci*. 2023;5(1):27-36. <https://meijss.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MEIJSS-27-36.pdf>.
- Mona Jebiril. Universities can take concrete steps to support he in Gaza. *University World News*, 13 August 2024. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20240813161936167>.
- Turkish Academy of Sciences. Statement by the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) about the latest situation in Palestine. News, 19 October 2023. <https://www.tuba.gov.tr/en/news/about-academy/statement-by-the-tuba-about-the-latest-situation-in-palestine>.
- Daily Sabah. World scientific community under fire over silence on Gaza. Daily Sabah, 1 March 2024. <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/world-scientific-community-under-fire-over-silence-on-gaza/news>.
- Shekhani S, Jafarey A. Amid explosions in Gaza, the silence from the bioethics community is deafening. *J Bioeth Inq*. 2024. doi: 10.1007/s11673-024-10364-w.
- Venegas N. Colleges could lose millions over pro-Palestinian protests. *Newsweek*, 30 October 2023. <https://www.newsweek.com/colleges-lose-funding-donors-israel-hamas-conflict-1839203>.
- Albhaisi, S. (2024). The impossible mission: to save and support science in Gaza. *Lancet* 2024;403(10429):806. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(24)00238-1.
- Williams T. Digital Universities UK: cut ties with Russian universities, says UK government minister. *Times Higher Education*, 15 March 2022. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/digital-universities-uk-cut-ties-russian-universities-says-uk-government-minister>.

16. Syal R, Allegretti A. Waving Palestinian flag may be a criminal offence, Braverman tells police. The Guardian, 10 October 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/oct/10/people-supporting-hamas-in-uk-will-be-held-to-account-says-rishi-sunak>.
17. Academics4Gaza. Helping Palestinian students in times of crisis. Academics4Gaza, 2024. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/academics4gaza_academics4gaza-a4g-educationinemergencies-activity-7201864300188098561-uYaF.
18. Alkhaldi M, Asi Y, AlBada M, Mansour W. (2024). Rethinking and advancing the movement of resistance activism and advocacy in health in four central arenas of the Middle East Region. World Med Health Pol. 2024;16(4):692-708. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.633>.
19. Buheji M, Hasan A. Challenging injustice - Stretching the 'academic boycott' after war on Gaza 2023. 2024. 10.5281/zenodo.11259671.
20. PBS News. WHO director says situation with Gaza's health care system is 'catastrophic'. PBS News, 20 November 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/who-director-says-situation-with-gazas-health-care-system-is-catastrophic>.