

This petition was first disseminated on the 05th of September, within just two days it was signed by over 100 South African academics. To date it has close to 250 signatories from over 21 SA academic institutions.

The petition is ongoing and can be viewed at: www.ujpetition.com

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG PETITION

SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMICS SUPPORT THE CALL FOR UJ TO TERMINATE RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAELI INSTITUTION

As members of the academic community of South Africa, a country with a history of brute racism on the one hand and both academic acquiescence and resistance to it on the other, we write to you with deep concern regarding the relationship between the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU). The relationship agreement, presented as 'merely the continuation' of a 'purely scientific co-operation' is currently being reviewed owing to concerns raised by UJ students, academics and staff.

For reasons explained below and detailed in the attached **Fact Sheet**, we wish to add our voices to those calling for the suspension of UJ's agreement with BGU.

As academics we acknowledge that all of our scholarly work takes place within larger social contexts – particularly in institutions committed to social transformation. South African institutions are under an obligation to revisit relationships forged during the apartheid era with other institutions that turned a blind eye to racial oppression in the name of 'purely scholarly' or 'scientific work'.

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories has had disastrous effects on access to education for Palestinians. While Palestinians are not able to access universities and schools, Israeli universities produce the research, technology, arguments and leaders for maintaining the occupation. BGU is no exception, by maintaining links to both the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and the arms industry BGU structurally supports and facilitates the Israeli occupation. An example of BGU's complicity is its agreement with the IDF to provide full university qualification to airforce pilots within a special fast-tracked BGU programme. Furthermore, BGU is also complicit in the general discrimination at Israeli universities against Palestinians and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

It is clear to us that any connection with an institution so heavily vested in the Israeli occupation would amount to collaboration with an occupation that denigrates the values and principles that form the basis of any vibrant democracy. These are not only the values that underpin our post-apartheid South Africa, but are also values that we believe UJ has come to respect and uphold in the democratic era.

We thus support the decision taken by UJ to reconsider the agreement between itself and BGU. Furthermore, we call for the relationship to be suspended until such a time that, at minimum, the state of Israel adheres to international law and BGU, (as did some South African universities during the struggle against South African apartheid) openly declares itself against the occupation and withdraws all privileges for the soldiers who enforce it.

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FULL LIST OF SIGNATORIES
FOLLOW ON PAGE FOUR.

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FACT SHEET

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories has had disastrous effects on access to education for Palestinians. Palestinian students face immobilisation, poverty, gendered violence, harassment and humiliation as a result of Israeli policy and actions [1]. Israel has also explicitly mounted direct attacks on Palestinian education, with complete closures of Hebron University and the Palestinian Polytechnique in 2003 and the targeting and bombing of more than 60 schools during the attacks on Gaza in 2009 [2].

Israel's assault on the access to education of Palestinians is illegal under international law. The right to education is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 as well as other international declarations and instruments.

Ben-Gurion University is complicit in these illegal actions. President, Rivka Carmi, describes the University as a 'proudly Zionist institution' [3], which effectively supports the official ideology of the Israeli state. Beyond this general support to the State of Israel, some of BGU's direct links to Israeli racism and occupation are detailed below.

1. LINKS TO MILITARY

BGU maintains material links to both the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) [4] (and the arms industry) and therefore structurally supports and facilitates the Israeli occupation. This is evident through various examples, including the following:

- BGU aids and provides academic scholarships and has official protocols for providing support to army reservist students [5].
- BGU offered scholarships and extra tuition to students who served in active combat units during the attack on Gaza in 2009 [6] in which 1400 Palestinians were killed, in acts described by Judge Richard Goldstone as war crimes.
- BGU offered a special grant for each day of service to students who went on reserve duty, in addition to other benefits [7], during the period of operation "Cast Lead"—Israel's attack on Gaza that had resulted in the killing of more than a thousand Palestinians.
- BGU also initiated the idea of, and tendered for, a military medicine school [8] designed specifically to train medical staff for the Israeli Armed Forces.
- BGU collaborates with the IDF by providing full university qualifications to Israeli Airforce Pilots within a specialised program [9].

2. DISCRIMINATION

- While Palestinian citizens of Israel constitute more than 20% of the country's population, only 9.5% of B.A. students, 4.8% of M.A. students, 3.2% of Ph.D. students and a mere 1% of the academic staff in Israeli academic institutions are Palestinians [10].
- The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report detailing how Palestinian applicants are three times as likely to be rejected by Israeli academic institutions than Jewish applicants [11].
- BGU has no programs of study conducted in Arabic in spite of Arabic being an official language of Israel and the first language of more than a fifth of Israel's population.

3. CRIMINALISING DISSENT

- BGU has been publicly criticised for disciplining academic staff, such as Professor Neve Gordon, the head of the politics department, for supporting the non-violent boycott of Israeli companies and institutions which profit or are complicit in the Israeli occupation.
- BGU maintains obstacles that prevent students from mounting legal political demonstrations and activities. This was intensified during Israel's military attack on Gaza.
- Constituting a form of intimidation, security guards at BGU photograph and intrusively monitor anti-occupation political activists [12].

[1] "Right to Education Fact Sheet" , Birzeit University (30 April 2009) <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/article495>

[2] "Right to Education Fact Sheet: Gaza", Birzeit University (15 June 2009) <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/article472>

[3] "Ben-Gurion University's president responds to one of her professor's call for a boycott of Israel" (1 September 2009) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/sep/01/opinion/oe-carmi1>

[4] The IDF is publicised as a funding source for the University's Research and Development Authority on the University's website: http://cmsprod.bgu.ac.il/Eng/Units/osr/funding/funding_sources.htm

[5] Dean Of Student Office, 2009, "Protocol of treatment of students who serve in army reserve duty," Ben Gurion University website: <http://cmsprod.bgu.ac.il/Dekanat/reserve>

[6] "Student, It Pays To Serve In Reserve Duty," (March 16th 2009) <http://www.mynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3687266,00.html>

[7] "Student, It Pays To Serve In Reserve Duty," (March 16th 2009) <http://www.mynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3687266,00.html>

[8] "Hebrew U, Ben-Gurion compete to create IDF medical school", The Jerusalem Post (18 December 2008) <http://www.jpost.com/HealthAndSci-Tech/Health/Article.aspx?id=125015>

[9] Pilots receive a bachelor's degree at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev after one year's study. Levy, Gideon "The Shin Bet's Academic Freedom," Haaretz (8 September 2008) <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-shin-bet-s-academic-freedom-1.253397>

[10] Hamda, Sharif "Handclap with one hand: Cheers for tolerance and pluralism in Israeli Academia," Adalla (May 2005)

[11] Hamda, Sharif "Handclap with one hand: Cheers for tolerance and pluralism in Israeli Academia," Adalla (May 2005)

[12] "Campus security guards photograph student protestors" Haaretz (26 June 2009) <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/campus-security-guards-photograph-student-protestors-1.278838>

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