

An open letter from the presidents of Gaza universities: Our campuses may have been razed, but our universities continue to exist

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We, the presidents of Gaza's three non-profit universities – Al-Aqsa University, Al-Azhar University-Gaza, and the Islamic University of Gaza— together accounting for the vast majority of Gaza's students and faculty members, issue this unified statement to the international academic community at a time of unprecedented devastation of higher education in Gaza.

Israel's ongoing genocidal war has brought about scholasticide—a systematic and deliberate attempt to eliminate our universities, their infrastructure, faculty, and students. This destruction is not collateral; it is part of a targeted effort to eradicate the foundations of higher education in Gaza— foundations that have long stood as pillars of resilience, hope, and intellectual freedom under conditions of occupation and siege. While academic institutions across Palestine have faced attacks for decades, what we are witnessing today is an escalation: a shift from repeated acts of destruction to an attempt at total annihilation

Yet, we remain resolute. For more than a year, we have mobilised and taken steps to resist this assault and ensure that our universities endure.

Despite the physical obliteration of campuses, laboratories, libraries, and other facilities, and the assassination of our students and colleagues, our universities continue to exist. We are more than buildings – we are academic communities, comprised of students, faculty, and staff, still alive and determined to carry forward our mission.

As articulated in the Unified Emergency Statement from Palestinian Academics and Administrators issued on May 29, 2024, "Israeli occupation forces have demolished our buildings, but our universities live on."

For over a year, our faculty, staff and students have persisted in our core mission – teaching – under unimaginably harsh conditions. Constant bombardment, starvation, restrictions on internet access, unstable electricity, and the ongoing horrors of genocide have not broken our will. We are still here, still teaching, and still committed to the future of education in Gaza. We urgently call on our colleagues around the world to work for:

- A sustainable and lasting ceasefire, without which no education system can thrive, and an end to all complicity with this genocide.
- Immediate international mobilisation to support and protect Gaza's higher education institutions as vital to the survival and long-term future of the Palestinian people.
- Recognition of scholasticide as a systematic war on education, and the necessity of coordinated and strategic international support in partnership with our universities for the resilience and rebuilding of our academic infrastructure and communities.

We appeal to the international academic community –our colleagues, institutions, and friends – to:

- Support our efforts to continue teaching and conducting research, under siege and amidst loss.
- Commit to the long-term rebuilding of Gaza's universities in partnership with us, respecting our institutional autonomy and academic agency.
- Work in partnership with us. Engage directly with and support the very institutions that continue to embody academic life and collective intellectual resistance in Gaza.

Last year, we formally established the Emergency Committee of Universities in Gaza, representing our three institutions and affiliated colleges – together enrolling between 80 and 85 percent of Gaza universities' students. The committee exists to resist the erasure of our universities and offer a unified voice for Gaza's academic community. It has since established subject-focused subcommittees to serve as trusted and coordinated channels for support.

We call upon academic communities around the world to coordinate themselves in response to this call. The time for symbolic solidarity has passed. We now ask for practical, structured, and enduring partnership.

Work alongside us to ensure that Gaza's universities live on and remain a vital part of our collective future.

Acknowledgments:

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