P23-24/079

Protect our freedom to express solidarity with Palestine

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## The branch notes:

* Since October 2023, 400 schools and all 12 universities have been destroyed in Gaza[[1]](#footnote-2) , 6000 students have been killed, 230 school teachers have been killed, 100 professors and 2 university presidents have been killed[[2]](#footnote-3). The UN reports that at least 60 percent of educational facilities (including 13 public libraries) have been damaged or destroyed and that at least 625,000 students have no access to education[[3]](#footnote-4).
* [The UN](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza) has raised concerns over the ‘pattern of attacks on schools, universities, teachers and students on the Gaza strip’ amounting to the ‘systemic destruction of the Palestinian education system’ and leading to charges of ‘scholasticide’.[[4]](#footnote-5)
* Palestinian academics and higher education workers in the UK have called on UK universities to publicly commit to rebuilding destroyed schools, hospitals and universities in Gaza and to support Palestinian higher education workers and institutions.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* There are protests and/or encampments at 80 university campuses across the US ([BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-68919182)).
* Hundreds of students and staff at several US universities have been arrested while protesting against Israel's war on Gaza. At least 900 students and faculty members have been arrested in the US over the past 10 days. Police and campus security have been criticised for heavy handed responses to peaceful student protests following the release of photographs of armed police beating students and using tear gas.[[6]](#footnote-7) Police have deployed snipers on the rooftops of [Ohio State University](https://eu.indystar.com/story/news/2024/04/29/isp-leader-confirms-officers-with-sniper-capabilities-on-iu-rooftop/73503945007/) and the [University of Indiana](https://www.thelantern.com/2024/04/university-says-officers-had-readied-firearms-directed-toward-protesters-from-ohio-unions-roof-once-arrests-began/). A [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5t5ldOXvwQ) of the forceful arrest of economics professor Caroline Fohlin at Emory University (Georgia), who appears to be stepping in to question the treatment of a student protester, has added to concerns.
* In addition to arrests, universities have taken punitive action against students taking part in peaceful protests, including suspensions. The daughter of US Congresswoman, Ilhan Omar was suspended following a peaceful protest at Barnard University, despite having no disciplinary record and left with no accommodation as a result ([The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/ilhan-omar-daughter-columbia-gaza-protest-b2532710.html)).
* There have been reports of student protestors being subjected to doxxing (the posting of personal information without consent) and receiving threats, with no support or protection offered from their institution ([Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/29/mapping-pro-palestine-campus-protests-around-the-world)).
* UK institutions have also seen unprecedented momentum in actions calling for a ceasefire in Palestine, including charity fundraisers, protests and demonstrations. Students at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University College London (UCL), and the Universities of Warwick, Leeds, and Nottingham, among other universities, have organised sit-ins and encampments.
* UK student activists who advocate for Palestine have also been subjected to punitive measures from their institutions, with reports of SOAS and Manchester suspending their students[[7]](#footnote-8) and Nottingham deploying bailiffs to forcefully remove student activists[[8]](#footnote-9).
* Cardiff University students passed a motion calling for a ceasefire at the Students' Union AGM in November 2023.[[9]](#footnote-10) Many students have also taken part in actions on campus to oppose the university’s links with arms companies, as well as other actions in the local community[[10]](#footnote-11).

## The branch believes:

* UCU should stand up for academic freedom, which cannot be upheld when universities are being bombed, and when those speaking out against scholasticide and genocide are unfairly punished.
* As academics and university workers, we should commend students who have applied their learning about social justice from their curriculum through standing up against injustices in the real world. Students should also have their right for freedom of expression protected and upheld at their institution.

## The branch resolves:

* To publicly express solidarity with universities in Palestine that have been destroyed by Israeli bombardments, and with the families of those university workers and students who have been killed.
* To publicly express solidarity with students and university workers in the UK and around the world who are exercising their right to peacefully protest, and who have been subject to violence and punitive measures for supporting Palestine.
* To write to UCU's leadership and request provision of legal guidance to support and empower members to take part in peaceful activism in solidarity with Palestine.
* To write to Cardiff University's executive board requesting a public statement
  + (a) confirming that all staff and students can express solidarity with Palestinians under academic freedom and the right to freedom of speech.
  + (b) clarifying to all staff and students that expressing solidarity with Palestine is not inherently antisemitic.
  + (c) confirming that the University will take proactive steps to protect staff and students from defamation, intimidation and harassment linked to Palestinian solidarity, including those made on social media platforms and in the press.
  + (d) confirming that the University will not work with the police or private bailiffs to pursue punishments against students and staff involved in activism for Palestine, ideally in line with the Students’ Union Cops Off Campus Task and Finish Group’s findings and recommendations.[[11]](#footnote-12)

1. <https://mondoweiss.net/2024/04/dr-ghassan-abu-sittah-tomorrow-is-a-palestinian-day/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Figures from address given by Glasgow University Rector Ghassan Abu-Sittah [Read University of Glasgow rector's powerful first address on Gaza in full | The National](https://www.thenational.scot/news/24251491.read-glasgow-universitys-powerful-first-address-gaza-full/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See also: <https://dukeforpalestine.org/resources/> for more information about academics who have been killed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://x.com/fobzu/status/1783852882309091364>, 26 April 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See the following videos/newspaper reports: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/professor-emory-university-arrest-protest-b2536574.html>

   <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/gaza-protests-college-columbia-police-b2535367.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. For SOAS: <https://x.com/soas_palestine/status/1714087311745397154?s=61&t=6Ueec4QEmlCz3s7dUZ37vw>

   For Manchester: <https://x.com/mcrleftaction/status/1777354880291659858?s=61&t=6Ueec4QEmlCz3s7dUZ37vw> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://x.com/nottssolidarity/status/1731365956507648106?s=61&t=6Ueec4QEmlCz3s7dUZ37vw> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <https://www.cardiffstudents.com/news/article/secret/Policy-statement-students-call-for-a-ceasefire-Datganiad-polisi-Galwad-myfyrwyr-am-gadoediad/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See <https://www.voice.wales/palestine-solidarity-cardiff-university-forced-to-hold-bae-event-online-after-student-backlash/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <https://www.cardiffstudents.com/news/article/secret/Cops-Off-Campus-Updated-Statement-2023-/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)