

Vivienne Stern MBE

Chief Executive

Universities UK

Woburn House

20 Tavistock Square

London

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14 February 2024 (by email)

Dear Vivienne,

As General Secretary of UCU, I am writing to you about the horrific situation facing the higher education community in Gaza and am calling on Universities UK and vice-chancellors to support universities, staff and students in Palestine. This support needs to encompass a range of different elements.

Firstly, I urge vice-chancellors to actively consider the possible implications of the recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on current UK university policies. All states parties to the Genocide Convention, including the UK, have the duty to implement the orders of the ICJ and prevent genocide. This also means that third-state institutions that uphold the principles of international law are required to prevent complicity in genocide. Public bodies, including universities, should seek to ensure that none of their existing partnerships, funding arrangements and investments, involve institutions and corporations that are aiding and abetting Israel's 'plausibly genocidal acts' in Gaza. This is particularly the case regarding institutions and corporations that are supporting the actions of the Israeli armed forces in Gaza. As part of this process, UCU has raised concerns with the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) about stranded assets and reputational damage as the result of any Israeli holdings that could be linked to breaches of international law.

Secondly, Israel's current military offensive has resulted in the destruction of many universities and schools throughout Gaza and the killing of thousands of students, hundreds of teachers and support staff, and nearly 100 professors, including university deans and presidents. We call on Universities UK and individual vice-chancellors to speak out against this 'educide' and to call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

Thirdly, we call on UK vice-chancellors to initiate a series of measures for both the urgent reconstruction and long-term rebuilding of the higher education sector in Gaza. In response to the brutal military invasion of Ukraine, the UK higher education community has undertaken various actions to support our Ukrainian colleagues. This unprecedented response – which includes specific funding from UK research agencies and the establishment of multiple UK-Ukrainian institutional partnerships - highlights what can be done to assist university staff and students under military assault and occupation. Palestinian higher education, including in the Occupied West Bank, deserves a similarly comprehensive and co-ordinated response by UK higher education institutions.

In the spirit of international cooperation and solidarity, we urge UK universities to:

- Support our call for USS to immediately review its investments in light of the ICJ ruling and to withdraw from any Israeli holdings that are linked to breaches of international law.
- Develop partnerships with - and provide resources for - Palestinian higher education institutions that have been destroyed and/or severely damaged by the Israeli military.
- Provide institutional scholarships for Palestinian students and academic fellowships for staff who have seen their universities and educational opportunities destroyed.
- Establish a sector-wide taskforce with responsibility for developing a co-ordinated response to the crisis engulfing Palestinian higher education and to encourage the development of working groups at the institutional level to work on practical support measures.
- Lobby the UK government and research bodies for specific funding to support Palestinian higher education.

I look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Grady". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Jo Grady  
General Secretary