



Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 (GPSS)
 25 Graduate Life Center (0186)
 Blacksburg, VA 24061
 Email: gsa@vt.edu
gsa.vt.edu



**Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 GPSS Resolution 2021-22N3
 Resolution to Divest in Compliance with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions Movement**

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| First Reading by GPSS: | date |
| Second Reading by GPSS: | date |
| Staff Senate Review: | date |
| Faculty Senate Review: | date |
| Undergraduate Student Senate Review: | date |
| First Reading by University Council: | date |
| Approved by University Council: | date |
| Approval by University President: | date |
| Approved by Board of Visitors: | date |
| Effective: | upon approval |

WHEREAS, the summer of 2021 saw an unprecedented outpouring of solidarity in the United States with the Palestinian people in their struggle for liberation from Israeli apartheid, colonialism, and military occupation; and

WHEREAS, this solidarity movement emerged in immediate opposition to Israel’s latest military targeting of the besieged Gaza Strip, the ongoing violence against Palestinians in occupied Jerusalem and the West Bank as well as the lynching and targeted arrests of Palestinian citizens of Israel (see Appendix 1); and

WHEREAS, the recent acts of violence perpetrated by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people are only the latest iteration of a long-standing settler colonial project that began with the Nakba, or ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, in 1948 (see Appendix 2), which has had the consequence of creating millions of Palestinian refugees who continued to be denied their right to return to their homes in Palestine; that this settler-colonial project continues to manifest through the settlement movement in the West Bank and Jerusalem - considered illegal under international law - that aims to systematically de-Palestinize the landscape. Equally, the Gaza Strip has now been under a siege imposed by Israel and Egypt via land, air and sea since 2007 (see Appendix 2), which has left Gaza largely unlivable by being denied access to essential resources and services; and

WHEREAS, the political architecture of Israeli colonialism and apartheid has left Palestinians without any formal legal or political mechanisms through which they could secure protection

from Israeli colonial violence. Palestinians have been further unable to secure protection and achieve liberation through international institutions due to the overwhelming power exercised there by the United States and other Western states who provide cover for Israeli colonialism; and

WHEREAS, these political constraints compelled a broad representative cross-section of Palestinian society - comprising trade unions, civil society organizations, academic institutions, etc - came together in 2005 to call on allies across the world to support, and participate in, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel (See Appendix 2). This campaign calls for action to be taken against Israeli institutions that are actively participating in violence against Palestinians. The objective here is to support Palestinians in their efforts to bring material pressure and accountability to bear upon Israel in order to dismantle its structures of apartheid and settler-colonialism; and

WHEREAS, as a key component of the BDS campaign, Palestinian academic organizations and departments have made clear that academic institutions are not neutral arenas of knowledge production, exchange, and dissemination (see Appendix 3). Rather, academic institutions are demonstrably key sites of contestation that can either uphold or challenge Israeli apartheid and colonialism; and

WHEREAS, in light of these calls for support from Palestinian universities, it is not tenable for academic institutions and organizations to either continue to ignore BDS or reject it in the name of a non-existent neutral and free academic exchange of ideas. The choices in front of us are to either respond affirmatively to Palestinian calls for BDS or to reject them and in so doing continue being complicit in supporting Israeli academic institutions in their oppression of Palestinians; and

WHEREAS, the calls for BDS are especially relevant for academic communities in light of the involvement of Israeli universities and research institutions in the trampling of Palestinian freedom of speech and assembly, as well as in the broader development of Israeli military strategies and policing of Palestinian communities. For instance, Palestinian students at the Hebrew University were threatened with disciplinary procedures (including expulsion) for peacefully protesting in solidarity with Palestinian hunger-strikers in 2014 (see Appendix 1). The Hebrew University also proactively participates in the ongoing policing of life in the neighbouring village of Al 'Isawiya (on whose expropriated land the University stands), by maintaining a checkpoint between the village and the campus (one of only two routes in and out of the village, see Appendix 1), resulting in Palestinian students being harassed on a daily basis as they travel to and from campus. Israeli border police also use the Campus as a base from which to conduct raids and arrests in Al 'Isawiya on a regular basis. Other Israeli universities are also complicit in the ongoing violence of the Israeli State towards Palestinians. Tel Aviv University hosts the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), which boasts of having developed the so-called Dahiya Doctrine (see Appendix 1), a military strategy of asymmetric warfare which encompasses and legitimises the destruction of civilian infrastructure as a part of broader military tactical responses. The University of Haifa banned commemorations of the Nakba,

punishing Palestinian student organisers by restricting their campus presence to lecture theaters only, and entirely suspending two others (see Appendix 1). As a means of repressing resistance to the latest intensification of its violence against Palestinians, Israel has violently targeted Palestinian academics (see Appendix 1) with live fire and has sentenced students from Birzeit University to long prison sentences for peaceful protest (see Appendix 1); and

WHEREAS, it is clear then that the existing status quo is not one which upholds academic freedom, but rather is one which violently denies Palestinian academics the ability to freely participate in academic institutions and conferences around the world. This includes Palestinian academics who are unable to attend conferences for fear of being denied re-entry by Israeli colonial authorities. BDS does not, therefore, constrain academic freedom, but rather promises to open a path to support Palestinian academics as they resist the oppression they face at the hands of complicit Israeli academic institutions; and

WHEREAS, if the administration wants to meaningfully uphold Virginia Tech's core values of UT Prosim, a "commitment to diverse and inclusive communities," and "personal and institutional integrity," it must take immediate measures to address its complicity in collaborating with, and supporting, Israeli academic institutions implicated in the denial of Palestinian human rights; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Virginia Tech administrators and employees who sit on the board of the Virginia Tech Foundation immediately begin to implement the academic and cultural boycott of Israel by following the guidelines developed by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. This includes adopting as a general principle a boycott of all Israeli academic institutions complicit in maintaining the Israeli occupation and the denial of basic Palestinian rights. More specific measures called for are the following forms of institutional boycott: of academic events convened or co-sponsored by complicit Israeli institutions and funding from complicit Israeli institutions to academic activities/projects; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Virginia Tech administrators and employees who sit on the board of the Virginia Tech Foundation begin divesting all institutional investments from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation and apartheid.

Appendix 1: Examples of Israeli Violence Against Palestinians

Recent examples of Israel's violence against Palestinians are listed here and it should also be noted that there was local protests to support Palestinians in the face of ongoing settler-colonial violence:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/10000007787471/israel-airstrikes-gaza.html>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/7/al-aqsa-worshippers-protest-palestinian-evictions-in-jerusalem>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/18/israeli-settler-attacks-surge-against-palestinians>
- https://www.democracynow.org/2021/5/13/budour_hassan_israel_palestine

For a complete list of resources to support the claims made by the eighth whereas statement, please refer to these links put in the order in which they appear in the resolution:

- <https://www.972mag.com/hebrew-u-threatens-palestinian-students-with-expulsion-for-political-activities/>
- <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/Oppression%20of%20Issawiya%20Neighborhood-Correspondance%20between%20CAF%20%26%20HUJI.pdf>
- <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/disproportionate-force-israels-concept-of-response-in-light-of-the-second-lebanon-war/>
- <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/8279>
- <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2021/05/palestines-education-institutions-are-victims-of-conflict-again/>
- <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-israeli-military-courts-jeopardise-the-future-of-palestinian-students-47190>

Appendix 2: Relevant History of the Conflict

A brief history of the 1948 Nakba can be found here:

<https://theintercept.com/2020/02/01/hundred-years-war-palestine-book-rashid-khalidi/> and it should be noted that this history is expanded on in more depth by Edward Said in *The Question of Palestine* and other internationally recognized histories of the region.

The siege of Gaza is a particularly pernicious form of violence against Palestinians and has been described by activists such as Angela Davis as the world's largest open-air prison. For more details please read this timeline:

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/timeline-humanitarian-impact-gaza-blockade>

Appendix 3: BDS and Its International Support

For an introduction to what BDS calls for we provide this resource:

<https://decolonizepalestine.com/intro/bds-101/> and for more specific information on the

academic component of the boycott please refer to this resource:

<https://bdsmovement.net/academic-boycott>

We center in particular here the long standing calls made by the Palestine Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) (<https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/pacbi-call>) for academics across the world to boycott Israeli academic institutions. Birzeit University in occupied Palestine has renewed these calls after Israel's most recent intensification of violence against Palestinians in May 2021

(<https://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/birzeit-university-calls-concrete-action-end-israeli-colonialism-and-apartheid>), asking the following of academics across the world:

We call upon academic institutions and academics worldwide to boycott Israel and its complicit academic institutions, until it complies with its obligations under international law and by ending its regime of settler colonialism, occupation, and apartheid and respecting the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

We also call on academics to conduct their scholarship on Palestine ethically; by refusing terminology that does not reflect the reality of Palestinians, highlighting Palestinian voices and academics, and by refusing censorship of Palestinian scholars or those who support Palestine.