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Support Our Palestinian Colleagues and Reject Israeli Measures Against Academic Freedom

CUNY Community Statement: Support Our Palestinian Colleagues, Reject Israeli Measures Against Academic Freedom

Issued by CUNY for Palestine and Cross CUNY Working Group Against Racism and Colonialism, April 15, 2022. Individuals and groups can endorse the statement [here](#).

We, as members of the City University of New York community, express our strong opposition to Israel's most recent attempt to restrict Palestinian rights to education and to undermine the academic freedom and autonomy of Palestinian institutions of higher education. **A new Israeli military order scheduled to take effect in May 2022, "[Procedure for Entry and Residency of Foreigners in Judea and Samaria Region](#)," places Palestinian universities further under siege as it divests them of basic control over determining the needs and visions of their academic institutions.** We understand this latest assault on Palestinian rights to education and academic freedom to be embedded in the broader project of settler colonialism that has targeted Palestinian identity, land, life, and sovereignty in a myriad of ways.

This law grants the Israeli military absolute power to select which international faculty, academic researchers, and students can be admitted to teach or study at Palestinian universities. Under the directive, Israeli military officials determine the criteria for which international researchers may be granted visas; which academic disciplines international faculty may be hired in; and which fields of study are permissible for international students. Only academics that an Israeli military official considers to be "accomplished" and who will contribute to "regional cooperation and peace" according to Israeli military officials will be granted visas. Quotas are placed on the number of internationals in Palestinian universities (100 for faculty and 150 for students, per year), and large financial bonds may be imposed as a condition for obtaining a visa. The duration of employment for international professors is limited to 5 non-consecutive years (with a requirement to leave for at least 9 months within those 5 years). **"Foreigners" affected by this law include Palestinians whose residency rights have not been recognized by Israel.** Many Palestinian students, faculty, and academic researchers currently working and studying in Palestinian universities will thus be immediately affected by this directive; some may lose their jobs and their access to education, and will be forced to uproot their lives.

We declare our support for the [call to action](#) issued by Birzeit University, and our intent to stand in solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues "to defend the Palestinian people's right to education, free from duress, intervention, and political persecution." We encourage everyone committed to educational and social justice to join us in heeding their call

to “Work with us to break the siege that these regulations impose on Birzeit and other Palestinian universities. Accept our invitation to teach and learn in Palestine. Help us exercise our basic right to education and to preserve the institutional autonomy that we built over the decades despite all obstacles.”

At the heart of this new directive is the settler colonial drive of Indigenous erasure, as reflected in its use of “Judea and Samaria” in place of Palestine, or even the West Bank, in the title. As an occupying power, Israel is obligated under international law to refrain from impeding or harming Palestinian educational development. **We call on Israel to abide by international law to both protect and facilitate the functioning of Palestinian civil institutions, including higher education.** We urge Israeli authorities to repeal this destructive policy and instead adopt and implement a clearly documented and transparent policy enabling full access and presence to foreign nationals intending to work, study, or educate students at Palestinian universities in the occupied Palestinian territories. This is the bare minimum needed to ensure Palestinians’ right to education, and to secure for our Palestinian colleagues the forms of academic freedom that we so value for ourselves.

With little faith in Israel as an occupying power to uphold its obligations under international law, we call on CUNY, together with other US universities, to join us in our demands that Israel **1) repeal the new “Procedure for Entry and Residency of Foreigners;” 2) end its restrictions on entry based on political speech and Palestinian heritage; and 3) adopt policies granting visas for exchanges and work permits to Palestinian universities that are fully equitable with those applied to Israeli universities.** These demands are linked to our broader call on CUNY to endorse the Palestinian-led call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), including the boycott of Israeli cultural and academic institutions. **Specifically, and as part of our broader support for implementing BDS at CUNY, we demand that CUNY suspend all [study abroad programs in Israel](#) and other forms of institutional collaboration with Israeli institutions, as well as divest from contracts with all companies that aid in or profit from Israeli colonization, occupation, and war crimes.[1]**

We condemn Israel’s ongoing efforts to limit Palestinians’ academic freedom and join our Palestinian colleagues in asserting the right to education with dignity and autonomy. As our colleagues at Birzeit write, “This moment is dangerous for the future of Palestinian higher education, but it is also a moment to join together for justice, freedom, and equality. Palestinian universities, like all universities, are places of knowledge production that connect scholars and students across the globe and inspire them to imagine and build a better future for all.”

We invite individuals and organizations to endorse this statement. To endorse, please click [here](#).

Want to do more? Please read and sign on to the [“CUNY Community Statement of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.”](#)

[1] Institutional collaboration between CUNY and Israeli institutions currently includes: the [Ginsburg-Ingerman Overseas Student Exchange Program](#), an exchange program between City College and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; the [BC Program Study in Israel \(PSI\)](#), administered through Brooklyn College; the [Queens College Ben-Gurion University of Negev Semester Abroad Fellowship](#); and a summer [exchange program](#) administered by Hunter College. Additionally, Baruch College, Brooklyn College, City College, Hunter College, Queens College, and the College of Staten Island have all received grant funding from [US-Israel Binational Foundations](#), designed to “promote scientific relations between the U.S. and Israel by supporting collaborative research projects.” As of 2014, CUNY had invested at least \$1,093,900 in weapons manufacturers such as Boeing, General Electric, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon; tech and security companies such as Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, G4S, and Motorola Solutions; and construction firms such as Caterpillar and Cemex.

Signatories

Organizations

U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI)

ICAHD-USA

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network

Bayonet Records

Academics for Palestine - Concordia University

Jews for Palestinian Right of Return

Labor for Palestine

Green Mountain Solidarity With Palestine

Jewish Voice for Peace

Ithaca CJP/JVP

Northern New Jersey Jewish Voice for Peace

Palestine Solidarity Alliance of Hunter College

Critical Palestine Studies Association

JAm It! Journal of American Studies in Italy

CUNY School of Law Students for Justice in Palestine

Arab Crossroads

CUNY NLG

OUTlaws

Latin American Law Students Association

John Jay Students for Justice in Palestine

Bergen County Green Party

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