

December 06, 2023

Resisting Erasure, supporting Palestinians struggles for Survival

Open Letter from members of the research group *Human Rights and Diversities* and the *Norpart Palestine Project* at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) to international academic institutions

We, members of the research group *Human Rights and Diversities* and the *Norpart Palestine Project* at University of South-Eastern Norway-USN, join Birzeit University in urging the international academic community, unions, faculty, and students to uphold our intellectual and academic responsibility of pursuing trustworthy knowledge, protecting academic freedom, and acting to stop the genocidal war on the Palestinian people and to end Israeli settler colonialism (Birzeit, 2023).

While we strongly condemn any act of terrorism, whether perpetrated by Hamas or the state of Israel, in the last two months, Israel's bombardments of the Gaza Strip have resulted in the killing of over 15,899 Palestinians (OCHA 05/12/2023; UNRWA 22/11/2023), one third of whom are children, while forcibly displacing millions and collectively punishing the entire Palestinian population. Such attacks led to the destruction of over 60% of housing units, hospitals, schools, universities, and cultural heritage sites. The hostilities in the Gaza Strip have also worsened tensions in the West Bank. Israeli settler attacks and military raids against Palestinians in the area have dramatically escalated (The Guardian 24/10/2023; ICG 06/11/2023). Since October 7th, in the West Bank, Israeli forces killed 211 Palestinians (including 54 children), while Israeli settlers killed an additional eight Palestinians (including one child) (OCHA 23/11/2023). Israel has prevented the delivery of essential items for the survival of the Palestinians, such as food, water and electricity.

Israel's actions against the Palestinian people in the Gaza strip violate International Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law, and International Criminal Law. We urge the international academic community to stand for justice in Palestine, echoing voices that demand that the perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes are brought to justice according to International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law as established by the Geneva Conventions from 1949 and its Protocols, the Rome Statute, and international customary law. Moreover, Israel must respect its international legal obligations and dismantle its settlements, cease the eviction and the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homes and lands, and stop the illegal annexation. The international community has so far failed to hold Israel accountable for its oppressive, perverse, and illegal actions against Palestinians in the occupied territories. Global inaction has enabled a disturbing pattern of impunity for mass violations of international law (OHCHR 2021).

Academic institutions that are complicit with oppression must also be held responsible as they have been indispensable to the regime of settler colonial oppression and apartheid,

complicit in grave violations of human rights including developing military doctrines and legal justification for the indiscriminate mass targeting of Palestinians.

We urge the international community to immediately intervene to stop this barbaric aggression and to protect Palestinians from the dramatic escalation of Israeli war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing throughout all of Palestine and the continuous land dispossession. The ongoing impunity granted by the international community to the Israeli occupying forces must end today.

We would like to end this letter with Paulo Freire's words:

"Any situation in which A objectively exploits B or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human. With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun... There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation. Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons" (FREIRE, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1970).

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