אקדמיה לשוויון

أكاديميون من أجل المساواة

To:

UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression

Violations of Freedom of Expression in Israeli Academia since October 7th, 2023

Introduction

Academia for Equality (A4E) is a members' organization with more than 850 members, Palestinian citizens, and Israeli Jews, based in academic institutions in Israel and worldwide. A4E seeks to promote equality, inclusion, representation, and freedom of expression (FoE) in academia for all those who live in Israel/Palestine. A4E opposes academic institutions' complicity in occupation, apartheid, and war. We struggle for the freedom of Palestinian scholars and students in Israeli Academia and stand in solidarity with Palestinian academia. A4E emphasizes the importance of protecting and promoting FoE in academic institutions for several reasons:

1. Higher education institutions are central sites for free speech and political activity;
2. As educational institutions, they should operate under conditions that respect FoE;
3. FoE is crucial for scholars employed in academia, as public intellectuals;
4. Academic institutions are sites for knowledge production and scholarship.

Sources of information

A4E has been gathering information on violations of FoE in Israeli academic institutions through multiple channels:

1. The hotline for students and scholars: This dedicated service provides a safe and confidential way for students and scholars in Israeli academic institutions to report

incidents of intimidation, incitement, suspensions, or other forms of speech suppression they have experienced or witnessed on campus. The hotline serves as a crucial first point of contact, allowing A4E to document cases and offer immediate legal and/or personal support to those affected.

2. The faculty solidarity team: This team, composed of experienced academics, works closely with faculty members who face challenges to their academic freedom. They provide peer support, legal advice, and advocacy within institutional frameworks. The team also monitors broader trends in academic policies that might restrict FoE.
3. The international solidarity team: This international network of Israeli academics and supporters helps amplify voices from within Israeli institutions to a global audience. They document cases of academic freedom violations, organize support campaigns and seminars, and work to maintain international pressure on Israeli academic institutions to uphold the principles of FoE.

Through these interconnected channels, A4E is able to build a comprehensive picture of the state of FoE in Israel. This multi-faceted approach allows A4E to respond swiftly to individual cases, identify systemic issues, and develop strategies to protect and promote FoE in academic settings.

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Violation and Suppression of FOE

1. Violations by Israeli academic institutions

1.1. Against Students

According to the Association of Arab Students, 160 Palestinian[1] students studying at Israeli universities or colleges have faced **disciplinary action** from their institutions since the beginning of the war. These cases mainly related to students expressing opinions, via social media platforms, against the war, which institutions interpreted as "support for terrorism" (see some documented cases here, here, and here). This began at the University of Haifa shortly after October 7, with the provost **suspending** eight Palestinian students **without due process**, thus marking all Palestinian students as guilty. This prompted a group of faculty members to send a letter questioning the provost's authority to take this action. The provost responded with another letter calling the students "Hamas supporters", and ending with a request that one of the signatories - a member of the university management - resign. These exchanges were made public, leading to wide campaigns against the Palestinian students and the faculty members who questioned the provost's decision. None of the suspended students were charged, and some decided not to continue their studies at the University, most likely due to fear. In January 2024, the provost was announced as the next president of Haifa University.

A report by Adalah, The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, indicates that out of the 124 students who sought legal assistance from Adalah, 66 were **expelled** or **suspended** without due process by their institution. Of the 84 cases that concluded (up until March 2024), 35 students were acquitted. For further details, refer to A4E report from November 2023, reports by Adalah and Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI);

[1] Palestinian students here and elsewhere in this document refer to students who are Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, including East Jerusalem residents.

for further media coverage, see articles published in Haaretz, Washington Post, +972, The New York Review, and others.

1.2. Against academic faculty

Israeli academic institutions also initiated **disciplinary actions** against faculty members who adopted a critical stance regarding the war on Gaza - including **suspensions**, **dismissals**, and **worsening of working conditions** (especially towards tenured academics). A4E has documented numerous such cases in its report, some of which are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Scholar	Affiliation	Disciplinary action	Sources & Media Coverage
Uri Horesh	Achva Academic College	Dismissal	BRISMES letter; Interview
Warda Sada	Kaye College	Dismissal	Haaretz; A4E
Nurit Peled-Elhanan	David Yellin College	Suspension, followed by her resignation	NYT; A4E
Regev Nathansohn	Sapir College	Worsening of working conditions	Times of Israel; Ynet
Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian	Hebrew University	Suspension from teaching; two public letters of condemnation (October & March)	New York Times; Adalah; The7eye Haaretz; +972
Anat Matar	Tel Aviv University	Public statement of condemnation	Haaretz; +972; Ynet

Concurrently, academics who have expressed racist sentiments or even calls for crimes to be done by the Israeli state were not sanctioned by their institutions. One example is the case of Prof. Avi Bareli from Ben-Gurion University (for details, see the letter sent by A4E). Another example is the letter sent by a group called Physicians for the Rights of IDF Soldiers calling for the destruction of the "hornet nests and the hospitals shielding

them", with some of the signatories teaching at academic institutions, such as the Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University.

1.3. Restriction of political activity on campus

Israeli academic institutions have **restricted political activities** on campus which oppose the ongoing war on Gaza. Examples of this include the controversy surrounding the Nakba memorial ceremony at Tel Aviv University (further details can be found at Haaretz and ACRI) and the restrictions imposed by Tel Aviv University on Hadash students' chapter activities (see the letters sent by A4E and ACRI). Moreover, when activities do take place, some institutions have **failed to maintain a safe atmosphere** for attendees. For example, a seminar organized by critical scholars at Ben-Gurion University was disrupted by right-wing groups unchallenged by campus security, as described by Prof. Oren Yiftachel and Ma'ariv.

2. Violations by Israeli authorities

2.1. Israeli police

Israeli police, aided by Israeli universities, colleges, and students, have **arrested** at least 10 Palestinian students over political expression on social media platforms. Some students were released as part of the hostage exchange deal in November 2023, leading to serious concerns about their futures.

The Israeli police **arrested** Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian for her remarks on the podcast Makdisi Street, searched her house, kept her in custody overnight, and extensively interrogated her over her political opinions and academic articles. The arrest came after months of incitement by the heads of Hebrew University against her, culminating in her suspension from teaching. For details of the case, see Adalah, +972, and Haaretz.

2.2. Israeli legislators

Israeli legislators have been **advancing legislation** aiming to restrict FoE and promote surveillance in academia. In October 2023, the Minister of Education Yoav Kisch requested that academic institutions take **disciplinary action** against students who 'express support for terrorism' and **report their treatment** of such students to the Council for Higher Education—a request rejected by the committee of heads of universities. However, some academic institutions did transfer information about student cases to authorities (as documented by Adalah and A4E). Furthermore, Israeli legislators are **advancing a host of bills** that expand the legal definition of incitement (see ACRI; Haaretz; Mossawa). Among these, a bill targeting academics has been introduced, as explained in the next section.

3. Unsanctioned violations by right-wing groups:

Right-wing groups have engaged in **smear campaigns and incitement** against academics and student activists expressing critical views regarding the ongoing war in Gaza (construed as "left-wing bias" or "anti-Zionism"). This is done through **informing against them**, **including their names on 'black lists,'** and **defaming them** (see Im Tirtzu, Btsalmo). For example, right-wing groups have led **campaigns against faculty members** at University of Haifa, Sapir College, Ben-Gurion University, Hebrew University, and Tel Aviv University. In November, a file was circulated online, containing details of Palestinian students, screenshots of their social media posts, links to their online profiles, and the department where they study. These campaigns have not been addressed properly by academic institutions or state authorities.

At Netanya College, a right-wing group **violently protested** in front of dorms housing Palestinian students, demanding their removal while chanting "death to Arabs" and

attempting to break into the dorms. In response, the municipality and the college management requested that the Palestinian students vacate their dorms. According to the available information, none of the protesters was held accountable for their actions. For further details and video documentation, see Times of Israel, Middle East Eye, Local Call, and A4E.

Furthermore, as part of the right-wing campaign, the Chair of the National Union of Israeli students is **pushing for legislation** that would require the dismissal of scholars who have expressed views critical of Israel as a "Jewish and democratic" state. This was accompanied by a **billboard campaign** targeting Dr. Anat Matar and Prof. Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian (see images below). It should be noted that the bill has been strongly opposed by the heads of universities, the heads of public academic colleges, and other academic groups. However, none of the personal targeting campaigns aimed to silence and intimidate critical scholars were directly addressed by academic institutions and state authorities. In particular, the president of Tel Aviv University published a detailed letter against the bill, warning that “if the bill becomes law, Israeli academia would be no different than academia in totalitarian regimes.” Concurrently, however, he did not substantively defend his targeted faculty member, stating that “the University administration denounced Dr. Matar’s behavior. However, she did not commit a crime, and we therefore have no intention to fire her.” As previously outlined, the Hebrew University administration went further, publishing two letters of condemnation against their targeted faculty member, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and not defending her after the campaign against her began.





4. Violations by international academic institutions:

As part of A4E's vision and actions to uphold FoE in academia both within and outside of Israel, we have received reports of FoE violations in academic institutions worldwide. Academics, both Israeli and international, face repercussions for expressing critical views. Relevant cases include:

- An article by Rabea Eghbariah, a PhD student at Harvard Law School, has been censored by the Harvard Law Review and Columbia Law Review. For further details, see the Guardian.
- A job offer to Prof. Raz Segal at the University of Minnesota was rescinded after his criticism of “Israeli genocide.” For further details, see the Middle East Monitor.
- Prof. Huda Fakhreddine was harassed and threatened due to expressing critical views on Israel, and her candidacy for an award was removed (see the letter sent by A4E).
- Faculty at UPenn University were defamed and harassed due to their critical remarks on Israel (see the letter sent by A4E).

- Prof. Michael Eisen, who shared tweets criticizing Israel's war on Gaza and expressing solidarity with Palestinians, was attacked, leading to his resignation as an eLife editor (see the letter sent by A4E).

5. Implications:

These violations and the general atmosphere of intimidation have led to **a chilling effect**, undermining the foundational principles of academic freedom, open dialogue, and knowledge production. A leading human rights lawyer and activist, Michael Sfard, explained in an interview to CBS that freedom of speech in Israel was largely protected through the courts and case law. However, over the last decade, those protections have "been ignored or deteriorated." He warns that *"80, 90% of [the arrests] will not bring about an indictment, but the damage is done… Because people that are called or detained in order for investigation, they go through a night, and the chilling effect for speech and the chilling effect of having an open discussion on the means of warfare [used] in Gaza is completely, completely crushed."*

Signs of chilling effects can be seen among Palestinian students in the results of a survey conducted by the Arab Student Movements Union in December 2023 which included 809 Palestinian student respondents from various Israeli academic institutions: 97% said they felt that their academic institutions were hostile environments, while 87% said they felt that their activities were being monitored.

Moreover, indications of **self-censoring** among Palestinian citizens of Israel since the beginning of the war have been rising, as highlighted in interviews published in the Guardian. Furthermore, recent research conducted by Dr. Hama Abu-Kishk notes a significant decline in social media use among Palestinian citizens of Israel, with 77% reporting that they have stopped commenting, sharing, or liking posts related to the war.

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Thank you for considering this information. We welcome any further inquiries at info@academia4equality.com.

Sincerely,
Academia for Equality executive board