

20 February, 2024

The Right Honourable Prime Minister

House of Commons

London

SW1A 0AA

The Leader of the HM Official Opposition

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Dear Prime Minister and Keir Starmer,

Subject: Condemnation of the Destruction of Universities and Killing of Academics in Gaza

We write to you on behalf of the British International Studies Association, an organisation dedicated to the advancement of international studies, to express our profound concern and condemnation regarding the [destruction of universities and the targeted killing of academics in Gaza and their families](#). The violence against academics in Gaza joins attacks documented by [Scholars-At-Risk](#) that have recently taken place in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Mexico, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States. The repercussions of such actions extend far beyond national borders, impacting research collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the fundamental values of [academic freedom](#) that are vital for the progress of humanity. We note that previously the UK government launched the [Researchers at Risk Fellowship](#) programme to “support Ukrainian researchers fleeing the conflict, as well as those already in the UK who are unable to return home” within a month of the invasion by Russia.

The detrimental impacts of conflict on learning in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are well-established. A [2007 UNESCO commissioned report](#) noted that while “the effects of the occupation on education quality are difficult to measure, there is clear cause for concern...the consequences of stress and emotional damage to students and teachers are real”. Prior to the latest escalation in violence, the [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack](#)

recommended that “parties to the conflict should protect the civilian character of schools and universities”.

The deliberate targeting of universities and academics has not only inflicted irreparable harm to the educational infrastructure in Gaza but also undermines the principles of intellectual freedom and scholarly exchange, which are the cornerstones of global academic cooperation. These acts of violence not only extinguish lives but also extinguish the hopes for a better tomorrow that universities represent, robbing future generations of opportunities to learn, discover, innovate, and improve.

As an organization committed to promoting and developing international studies in the UK and beyond, we believe that every effort must be made to safeguard academic institutions and protect the lives of scholars who dedicate themselves to research, knowledge exchange, and learning and teaching. Based on this principle, we believe that the UK government has a pivotal role to play in defending academic freedom by advocating for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and facilitating a peaceful resolution to a conflict that threatens the safety, integrity, and [freedom of all academic communities in the region](#) and many around the world.

We urge the UK government to use its diplomatic influence to engage constructively with international partners to bring an end to the violence that has destroyed universities and killed academics and their families in Gaza. Furthermore, we call upon Parliament to support initiatives aimed at rebuilding Gaza’s educational infrastructure and those that will safeguard academic freedom globally.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We remain hopeful that through collective efforts, we can work towards a world where universities are sanctuaries of learning, and academics are free to share and pursue knowledge without the threat of violence.

Sincerely,

Juliet Dryden, Director and CEO of the British International Studies Association

Prof. Kyle Grayson, Chair of the British International Studies Association

Prof. Juanita Elias, Vice-Chair of the British International Studies Association

Prof. Toni Haastrup, Secretary of the British International Studies Association

Dr. Laura Mcleod, Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer of the British International Studies Association

Prof. Ilan Zvi Baron, Trustee of the British International Studies Association

Dr. Nick Caddick, Trustee of the British International Studies Association

Prof. Helena Farrand Carrapico, Trustee of the British International Studies Association

Dr. Una McGahern, Trustee of the British International Studies Association

Prof. Simon Rushton, Trustee of the British International Studies Association

