



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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BRISMES Stands in Solidarity with Student Encampments

Over the past seven months, academic communities – students, staff, lecturers, and others – have watched the leaders of their institutions remain silent in the wake of the International Court of Justice’s ruling that Israel is plausibly carrying out genocide in Gaza and as United Nations bodies warn of imminent famine. They have witnessed their institutions’ lack of solidarity with their Palestinian counterparts as Israel has committed [educide](#), bombing every university and college in the Gaza Strip and killing over a hundred academic staff and thousands of students and pupils.

This lack of response in relation to the atrocities perpetrated in Gaza has not developed in a vacuum. In recent decades, the fundamental purpose of universities and colleges has been warped by marketization and financial interests, frequently leading them to prioritise profit over people and education. As part of this process, higher education institutions have become deeply embedded with arms, homeland security and surveillance industries through portfolio investments and research partnerships, and by inviting leaders from these industries to sit on their boards and councils. Consequently, many higher education institutions have become or are at risk of becoming complicit in egregious violations of international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and even genocide.

The current student encampments have emerged as spaces for students to mobilise as active participants in the political processes and decisions that impact their lives and in turn the lives of their counterparts across the world. While each encampment has its own particular voice, student demands are remarkably clear, focused and consistent: they are calling for an immediate permanent cease-fire in Gaza; an end to military support of Israel; material support for the rebuilding of Gaza’s higher education; and divestment from corporations feeding Israel’s war machine.

The encampments are also sites of learning and creativity, where students are holding a range of events to expand their knowledge and voice their concerns. Rather than uphold, defend and protect these lively sites of expression, many higher education leaders have treated them as a menace. Disregarding opportunities to hold meaningful conversations and genuine debates with protesting students, administrations have frequently opted to surveil, threaten, punish and suspend them, with several resorting to summoning armed police officers to violently remove them. These actions undermine and erode the fundamental mission and purpose of higher education.

As Europe’s largest academic association focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa, BRISMES stands in solidarity with the student encampments and calls on university and college leaders to respect their freedom of expression and assembly and to constructively engage with their demands. BRISMES believes that higher education institutions should be proud of students who refuse to stand idly by as crimes take place and who, in a variety of ways, struggle to build a better world.

BRISMES Council & BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom
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