

Palestinian Universities under Occupation



mercredi 1er juillet 2015 | par AURDIP

Summary of Findings

The delegation was unable to visit all of Palestine's institutions of higher education, and in particular it was prevented from visiting Gaza's universities by the Israeli blockade. However, it found a consistent pattern across all the universities that it visited, and by their systemic nature it is reasonable to assume that this pattern applies to all of them.

This pattern was of a coherent and multi-faceted policy of Israeli interference with the normal functioning of academic life. This interference inhibits free movement of staff and students ; reduces academic effectiveness and productivity by the usurpation of staff time through mobility restrictions and imposed bureaucratic obstacles ; prevents effective collaboration and sharing of intellectual resources between Palestinian universities ; obstructs international visits to Palestinian universities ; substantially prevents the employment of teaching staff from abroad ; interrupts the supply of equipment, materials and books ; and subjects staff and students to repeated humiliations and indignity.

Report

I. Introduction

Israeli's continuous expansion of settlements, in violation of international law and UN resolutions, has led to a situation in which the territories under Israeli's occupation, but nominally administered by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and by Hamas in Gaza, represent a mere 10% of Mandatory Palestine [1]. All access to these territories is controlled by Israel. About 4.5 million Palestinians live there, and almost none of them have access to the higher education system in Israel.

The Israeli government maintains nearly 60 colleges and nine universities [2], four of which, Israelis are proud to point out, figure among the top 300 in the 2014-5 QS World University Rankings. But some are built illegally on Palestinian territory. And all of them contribute directly or indirectly to Israel's military forces which maintain the illegal occupation by providing research and development, professional advice and training of potential recruits. [3] In return, they benefit from the vast subsidies the United States extends to Israel. In the current year the US has provided \$3.1 billion (2.8 billion euros) in direct military aid to Israel : roughly 55 per cent of America's total foreign military funding worldwide and the equivalent of 20 per cent of its current foreign aid budget. Europe is almost equally generous. Several European countries,

including Britain, actively promote research partnerships with Israeli academics. [4] Israel is also the sole non-European country to be accorded virtual membership of the European Union, giving Israeli universities direct access to the EU's multi-billion euro research funds and facilitating partnerships with researchers across the European area. [5] Despite Israel's adoption of neo-liberal economic policies in the early 2000s and reductions in public spending, successive governments have financed a rapid expansion of its higher education system. [6] This reflects general recognition of the universities' contribution to the country's military and economic strength and also to the image it seeks to project as a culturally advanced member of the developed world.

Behind the apartheid wall that divides the land, Palestinian universities endure conditions that could scarcely be more different from those of their Israeli counterparts. The West Bank and Gaza together have 14 universities, an open university for distance learning, 18 university colleges and 20 community colleges. Current student enrolment is 214,000, of which roughly 54 per cent are women and 46 per cent are men. [7] This compares favorably with Israel's tertiary sector where from a larger population enrolment is approximately 307,000 and the gender balance among undergraduates is 56 per cent women and 44 per cent men. [8] The remarkably high participation rate in the most difficult of circumstances no doubt reflects the importance Palestinians attach to the universities (and formal education more generally) for strengthening both their economy and their national identity.

But Palestinian universities struggle to perform these roles with none of the practical advantages of their Israeli counterparts. The most obvious difficulty is a severe and chronic funding shortage. In 2011-12 the Israeli government spent 1.9 billion euros on higher education, a total which has risen in recent years. [9] In 2014-15 the Palestine National Authority distributed a mere 1.8 million euros to the 12 public or state universities in the West Bank. (Information on support for the universities in Gaza is not available, but suffice it to note that at the time of writing public servants there have not been paid their salaries for many months. [10]) This pittance is only modestly supplemented by aid from foreign sources. The World Bank estimates total aid to Palestine in 2012 at just over 1.8 billion euros, but other organisations put the total lower. In any case, most of these funds were earmarked for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction of the damage wreaked on Gaza by Israel's assault in 2008-09. Little of it reached Palestinian universities.

In addition to chronic under-funding, the universities face the same malevolent policy that Israeli governments apply to the West Bank and Gaza in general, of de-development, demoralization and depopulation. [11] Evidence of this policy was provided by the Israeli assaults on Gaza both in 2008-09 (Operation Cast Lead) and in summer 2014 (Operation Protective Edge). According to a UN investigation, the first of these assaults left 220 kindergartens and schools partly or wholly destroyed ; the Islamic University was deliberately targeted and other universities were also damaged. [12] Preliminary reports indicate that the second assault destroyed another 22 schools from the already depleted stock. [13]

Less well known is the pattern of subversion that characterizes Israel's approach to Palestinian universities in the Occupied West Bank. Many of the universities were established after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 as a means of resisting Israel's comprehensive efforts to obliterate Palestinian culture and national identity. After the first Intifada began in December 1987, Israeli forces closed all Palestinian universities for four years. The signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 raised hopes that they would once again be permitted to function unhindered. But the accords have proved to be a chimera as much for the universities as

for Palestinian society as a whole. This Report briefly enumerates ways in which Israel obstructs and subverts the operation of the universities, and the consequences of these policies and practices for Palestinian higher education.

II. The pattern of Israeli obstruction and subversion of Palestinian higher education

1. Obstacles to travel within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)

Distances between towns in the OPT should make it possible to travel by coach from Jerusalem to any of the 14 Palestinian universities in less than three hours and to most within an hour. The practical experience, however, is quite different. Israeli occupation authorities have blockaded Gaza since 2007, and in particular have barred all movement of faculty and students between Gaza and the Occupied West Bank.

Within the Occupied West Bank travel is possible but completely unpredictable, as a result of deliberate Israeli policy. At the permanent checkpoints erected between the main towns, Palestinian travelers normally must dismount from the coach and wait for security clearance, which may take only 15 minutes but more often half an hour and sometimes much longer. Travel is also frequently further disrupted by temporary checkpoints and unmanned barriers or simply for the convenience of Israeli settlers. Thus during a single week in April over fifty Palestinian villages were sealed off by Israeli security forces. In addition, travel between Ramallah, the administrative capital of the OPT, and Nablus, home of An-Najah, the largest university in the West Bank, was halted for most of one day so that a marathon run for residents of illegal settlements could take place. And in a separate incident travel in and out of Nablus was halted to facilitate the visit of settlers to the Joseph's Tomb site. Perversely, much of the public transport in the Occupied West Bank is suspended on Israeli national holidays.

Besides the unpredictability of travel, Palestinians must expect humiliating treatment at checkpoints. The president of Bethlehem University reported a fourth year student's response to the question, 'what is the strongest impression you will take from your years here?' as follows: 'the daily anxiety coming up to the checkpoint and worrying about what would happen. Will I be waved through? Will the soldiers come onto the bus? Will I be made to get out of the bus? Will I be stood for hours in the sun? Will I be interrogated? Will I be strip-searched?'

The consequences of these obstacles for Palestinian universities can scarcely be exaggerated. In the first place, the faculty, students and administration who comprise the university community must allow several hours to complete even the shortest journey. The result for most Palestinian universities is that the day does not begin before 9 or 10 am and stops at 5 or even 4 pm. Compared with European universities, where activity on campus commonly begins by 9 am and continues late into the evening, this constitutes a loss of at least 20 per cent in the working day.

Second, obstacles to travel impose a substantial extra cost on faculty, administrators and especially students. The only guarantee of timely arrival at class is to purchase or rent accommodation near their university, in order to avoid the deliberately imposed uncertainties of travel. This is an effective tax on many students whose parental homes are not many kilometers away but dare not risk the vagaries of what otherwise would be a short daily commute.

Third, obstacles to travel discourage collaborative activity between the universities. In earlier years the universities sought to share expertise through academic visits and exchanges. But an academic visiting a neighboring university which should be just half an hour away to give a one-hour lecture must allow a whole day to complete the round trip journey. As a result visits or

exchanges of this kind are now uncommon. The practical effect is to isolate the universities from one another and diminish the quality of academic life.

Fourth, the extra time or cost imposed by obstacles to travel and the frequently abusive treatment received at the hands of the Israeli border police have discouraged West Bank students from attending universities outside their home towns or regions. This makes it more difficult for universities to become centres of excellence or to serve an integrative function in Palestine society. Instead, each university must replicate all the basic teaching functions and limit its ambitions merely to its own locale.

2. Obstacles to travel into and out of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)

For universities to function effectively, faculty must be free to travel abroad to attend conferences, undertake research, upgrade their qualifications and maintain contacts with scholars abroad. To ensure the circulation of knowledge, they must also be able to receive visits from foreign academics and scholars and enable their students to participate in exchanges. Palestinian universities report that Israel systematically obstructs all such activities.

Palestinian faculty, administrators and students, aside from the small minority with Jerusalem residence permits, have only one point of exit or entry : across the Allenby Bridge linking Palestine with Jordan. Because of Palestine's ambiguous legal status, Palestinians often require a visa to visit foreign countries. But obtaining visas is problematic because issuing offices are commonly located in Israel which most Palestinians require a special permit to visit. In addition to the difficulty of obtaining visas and the internal obstacles to travel described in the previous section, Palestinian academics repeatedly told us that they are frequently held up at the Allenby Bridge, for periods as long as 8 hours. Refusals of permission to leave, always without explanation, are not uncommon. For other intending travelers permission to leave may be made conditional on signing a statement confirming that they will not return for up to five years : the equivalent to a deportation order.

Many obstacles are placed in the way of academics (often though not exclusively members of the Palestinian diaspora, including those from the United States and Canada) who receive invitations to work at Palestinian universities. Resident status will not be granted, and anyone stating on arrival to Israel that they are there to take up a post at a Palestinian university will be refused entry. The only possibility of being admitted is to enter as a tourist, which is normally limited to a 3-month stay. The necessity of misrepresenting their status in the OPT leaves them constantly vulnerable to expulsion, while the three-month limit has other effects on their ability to contribute academically, especially to taught courses. The president of one Palestinian university who has not been allowed resident status reports that he possesses a multi-entry visa to the OPT issued by Israel, but at the Allenby Bridge Israeli officials regularly assert that the visa has expired, threaten to turn him back, and involve him in delays that range from half an hour to half a day.

The consequences for Palestinian universities of these obstacles to international travel are comparable to those of the internal obstacles to travel. In the first place, the extra time required is very considerable. Faculty seeking to attend even the briefest event abroad must allow an additional day to be sure of reaching their destination and a further day to return home. Second, it imposes substantial additional costs, not least because the likelihood of delays or refusals means that air tickets cannot be booked in advance. Third, it discourages travel, leaving faculty, administrators and students isolated from the international community and less able to pursue

research. Fourth, it seriously damages morale.

3. Israeli obstruction of foreign visitors to Palestinian universities

The obstructions already described apply to all foreign academic visitors, not just those wishing to work at Palestinian universities, and to students also. Intending visitors are frequently held up or refused entry by Israeli authorities. For example, Israeli authorities refused permission for five of the 75 foreign participants to attend the first world conference of Palestinian academics at An-Najah University in 2014, and granted permission to three or four others, including keynote speakers, only on the last day of the conference when it was too late to be of any value. Al-Quds University reports that a professor of law at Harvard University who recently sought to visit the university was interrogated at Ben Gurion airport (Tel Aviv) for fourteen hours before being permitted to proceed. Birzeit University reports that the South African Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande and three prominent South African academics were refused permission to visit the university in April 2015.

Foreign academics invited to teach a one-semester course and foreign students intending to study for a semester at any of the Palestinian universities are routinely granted only a three-month tourist visa. Palestinian universities, like most European universities, operate on a system of three four-month semesters. The visas therefore do not allow visitors to stay for a whole semester. And applications for renewal of visas are a lottery, so course planning may be thrown into disarray at short notice by opaque and unaccountable bureaucratic decisions. The universities report that many foreign academics and students are discouraged from attempting to visit on account of the obstacles put in their way.

The consequences of this obstruction are obvious. In the first place, Palestinian university administrators confront endless logistical problems in their efforts to secure the passage of visitors through Israeli barriers. According to a senior administrator at Al-Quds University, 30 percent of his time is devoted to problems of this sort. Second, teaching and learning are disrupted by premature departures or undermined by the failure of visiting academics or students to reach the campus. Third, the universities are isolated from the international community, and fourth these difficulties frustrate and demoralise faculty and students.

4. Obstacles to the import of books, equipment and materials

Obstacles to the movement of people are the most common cause for complaint in Palestinian universities. But only somewhat less frustrating are the obstacles Israel places in the way of importing books, equipment and materials. Certain types of machinery and supplies, in particular electronic equipment and chemicals, are banned outright by Israel who claim they might be used for terrorist purposes. But Israeli authorities routinely hold up practically all types of machinery and supplies for weeks, months or even years before allowing them to be delivered to the universities. This has created difficulties especially for research and teaching pure and applied sciences. The delegation heard of cases where academics who received a one-year grant to undertake a research project were unable to carry it out because the necessary materials did not arrive during their 12 month appointment. But the problem is not restricted to these academic disciplines. The director of an art academy complained of serious delays in the import of works of art and art books.

5. Arbitrary arrest and detention of Palestinian academics

Imad al-Barghouthi, a professor of astrophysics at Al-Quds University, was attempting to travel to

a congress of the Arab Association of Astronomy and Space Sciences at Sharjah University in the United Arab Emirates on 6 December 2014 when he was arrested at the checkpoint to Jordan and held in administrative detention without indictment or trial. He was only released nearly seven weeks later, after his detention was publicized within the international scientific community. In October 2014 Israel was holding over 470 Palestinians in administrative detention, bureaucratic terminology which translates into imprisonment without either trial or any statement of the grounds for detention. According to B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Israel violates international law in its grossly excessive use of administrative detention. Palestinian university administrators estimate that among the nearly five hundred detainees 40 were academics from the West Bank and 60 from Gaza.

The consequences of this practice for Palestinian universities are self-evident. But it is not only faculty who are targeted : students are also frequently detained without charge or trial. In fact, this is so common that several universities have developed special programs for the education of detained students.

6. The special case of Al-Quds University

Al-Quds University operates on five campuses of which three are in or near the city of Jerusalem on the Israeli side of the apartheid wall and two, including the main campus, are in Area B on the Palestinian side. This exposes the University to exceptional pressures from Israel which claims Jerusalem as its capital and uses every excuse to expel Palestinian residents. Not least because of the difficulties facing the Palestinian population of Jerusalem (Arabic name : Al-Quds) the University seeks to maintain and expand its public role in the old city. Israel has responded in a number of deeply hostile ways. It has refused to recognize the charitable status of the University's operations in Jerusalem, and repeatedly sued the University for carrying on unauthorized educational activities in the City. In the spring of 2015 it issued a demand for NIS 24 million (5.7 million euros) and seized some of the University's property in Jerusalem including the president's office and contents. It has also refused to recognize the qualifications of the University's graduates. Teachers with a bachelor's degree from Al-Quds University and resident status in Israel are paid there at the same rate as teachers with only a secondary school diploma. Medical doctors with an Al-Quds degree have not been permitted to practice on the Israeli side of the apartheid wall. A recent decision of the Israel Supreme Court enabled Al-Quds medical graduates to sit the Israeli professional examination this year. But it remains unclear whether the court's decision will be accepted as a precedent in future years.

Al-Quds' main campus at Abu Dis lies just outside Jerusalem and in clear view of the city. Nevertheless a high proportion of the University community do not have resident status in the city which lies out of bounds to them. The president of the University, Dr Imad Abu Kishek, is not permitted to visit Jerusalem or Israel. Israeli action is not limited to bureaucratic obstruction. A camera mounted high above the apartheid wall which runs barely a hundred meters from the main gate constantly monitors the Abu Dis campus. Army units regularly restrict access by erecting a checkpoint immediately outside the main gate, and appear to do so more frequently during examination time. Nor do they stop at the gate. In 2013 alone Army units invaded the campus no less than 26 times, injuring over 1700 students and staff. Bullet holes sprayed across the glass entrance to the medical school are evident from an incursion in the spring of 2014. Israeli forces recently destroyed the nearby family home of the head of the Al-Quds music department for reasons which remain obscure.

One of the most highly regarded components of Al-Quds University is its Institute of Archaeology.

While other Palestinian universities are running down their archaeology departments, the Institute has been expanding. Currently it oversees excavations at three sites, at Ramallah, Beit Sahur and Sebast near Nablus. Israel however has refused it permission to excavate in Area C of the Occupied Territories, where some 60 per cent of the West Bank's archaeology sites are located. Of the roughly 8,000 sites and features identified in the Occupied Territories, Israeli archaeologists have excavated or surveyed 1,200 without permitting Palestinians access to the sites or the accumulated finds. Members of the Institute are unable to teach the archaeology of Jerusalem since neither they nor their students are permitted to visit the city. They also doubt the probity of Israeli archaeological activity, much of which appears to be driven by a desire to find proof of Biblical claims about early Jewish civilization. Their rigid exclusion from sites in the Occupied Territories (to say nothing of 1948 Israel) has provoked suspicion that finds may be moved from one site to another to strengthen Jewish historical claims to the territory, and that evidence of other civilizations is being destroyed.

7. The impact of the Gaza blockade on Palestinian universities

Until Hamas took over sole control of Gaza in June 2007, several thousand students from Gaza attended universities in the West Bank. Israel's subsequent blockade of Gaza brought an immediate halt to practically all student movement into or out of Gaza. This was especially unfortunate for several categories of students. Gaza students who had begun their studies in the West Bank but were in Gaza when the blockade was imposed were unable to return to complete their degrees ; others in the West Bank were unable to return home in case they were not permitted to leave again. Students at the center operated in Gaza by the Al-Quds Medical School are required to complete their degree at Abu Dis, but since 2007 they have been unable to do so. Israel justifies its eight-year long blockade of Gaza on security grounds. But there can be no justification for denying en bloc permission for Gaza academics and students to teach or study in the West Bank. This is a denial of their human rights which gravely damages the welfare of Gaza and weakens all the universities of Palestine.

III. Recommendations

The Recommendations which follow are addressed to academics and other concerned individuals ; academic institutions and trade unions ; human rights and other non-governmental organisations ; and indeed to civil society in general, across Europe and beyond.

Recommendation 1 : *Assist the universities of Palestine by promoting exchanges, partnerships and visits*

Palestinian universities are extremely isolated and constantly appeal for assistance to enable their faculty to travel and collaborate with counterparts abroad, for their students to study abroad, and to receive visiting faculty and exchange students. Actions of this kind will, however, unfortunately in no way discourage Israel from continuing and intensifying its policy of academic blockade. Therefore action is also required at other levels

Recommendation 2 : *Pressure on European governments and the Commission of the European Union*

These bodies need to accept their share of responsibility for the lamentable situation that the delegation observed, and take remedial steps to redress decades of discrimination. For many years the EU and individual European countries have treated Israel as a privileged partner while doing almost nothing to assist Palestine. The restrictive approach to issuing visas to Palestinian

academic visitors, and where appropriate to their families as well, should be ended. Governments should make it a priority to make funds generously available to support academic partnerships and exchanges of faculty and students with Palestine.

Recommendation 3 : *Apply direct pressure on Israel by supporting the boycott of Israeli universities.*

It is regrettable that the recent historical record confirms that Western governments generally act on an issue of ethical importance only when civil society mobilizes in its support. Ending South Africa's apartheid policy was one such issue on which civil society led and governments belatedly followed. Israel's 48-year-long illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the subversion of Palestinian universities is a similar, albeit not identical, issue. As Palestinian university administrators and faculty repeatedly point out, Israeli universities have benefitted hugely from the largesse of Western governments without making the slightest effort to support their Palestinian counterparts or demonstrate solidarity with them. The only organized attempt to encourage solidarity among Israeli academics for their Palestinian counterparts proved to be a fiasco. In March 2008 a small group of prominent Israeli academics circulated a petition in support of the principle of unhindered access to higher education for Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories. Their petition reads :

"We, past and present members of academic staff of Israeli universities, express great concern regarding the ongoing deterioration of the system of higher education in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We protest against the policy of our government which is causing restrictions of freedom of movement, study and instruction, and we call upon the government to allow students and lecturers free access to all the campuses in the Territories, and to allow lecturers and students who hold foreign passports to teach and study without being threatened with withdrawal of residence visas. To leave the situation as it is will cause serious harm to freedom of movement, study and instruction - harm to the foundation of academic freedom, to which we are committed."

Of the roughly 8,500 senior and junior faculty who received the email inviting them to sign the petition, a total of 407 - less than 5 per cent - agreed to do so. Indications are that even fewer Israeli academics would sign a similar petition today.

The boycott calls on supporters to refuse collaboration with Israeli universities, whether as visiting lecturers, researchers, examiners or referees. It is not aimed at individual Israeli academics or researchers whose freedom to travel, lecture and collaborate in research is unaffected. It therefore does not hinder dialogue or free speech. [14]

In Conclusion

Israelis are inordinately proud of their universities for their advanced work in science and technology, their Nobel prizes and world rankings. But Israelis cannot have it both ways : claiming membership in the democratic world while pursuing violent policies of ethnic cleansing and undermining Palestinian higher education. The authors of this Report are convinced that academic boycott is the most effective, non-violent way for Western civil society to confront Israelis with the need to choose.

To learn more about the academic boycott, contact a national affiliate of EPACBI :

- The British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP)
- Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine, France (AURDIP)
- Akademisk og Kulturell Boikott av Staten Israel, Norway (AKULBI)
- Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, Sweden (PSABI)
- Belgian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI)
- BDS academico por Palestina (bdspbai[at]gmail.com)

Notes

[1] The territory directly controlled by Israel includes East Jerusalem, Area C of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and other land illegally settled in the West Bank as well as 1948 Israel, but excludes the Golan Heights, illegally seized from Syria. Source, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

[2] In addition to the eight universities listed on official Israeli English-language websites, Ariel College, located in an illegal settlement, was elevated to university status in December 2012.

[3] Uri Yacobi Keller, 'Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories', Alternative Information Center, № 23-24, October 2009

[4] The main British initiative is known as the Britain Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership or BIRAX, which is co-managed by the British Council.

[5] On Israel's virtual EU membership, see David Cronin, *Europe's Alliance with Israel : Aiding the Occupation* (London : Pluto Press, 2010)

[6] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Higher education in Israel - selected data, 28 November 2012.

[7] See the web site of the Palestinian Ministry of Education & Higher Education. On gender balance, see the report of RASIT

[8] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Higher Education in Israel - selected data 2010/11.

[9] European Commission, "Higher Education in Israel - EACEA - Europa" (2013).

[10] The New York Times International Weekly, 14 June 2015, p.3

[11] On Israeli de-development policy, see Robert Wade, 'Organised Hypocrisy on a Monumental Scale', LRB Online, 24 October 2014.

[12] General Assembly, Distr. GENERAL, A/HRC/12/48 25 September 2009, Human Rights in Palestine and other Occupied Arab Territories. Report of the United Nations fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict.

[13] Dan Cohen, 'In the last days of 'Operation Protective Edge' Israel focused on its final goal — the destruction of Gaza's professional class'. According to the International Middle East Monitoring Center, the assault left 277 schools, or almost 70 per cent of educational provision, damaged or destroyed.

[14] See the PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel (Revised July 2014)