

WHY BOYCOTT ISRAELI UNIVERSITIES?



How does it work?

PACBI urges people to **boycott all forms of cooperation with Israeli academic institutions**: academic projects or activities organized or sponsored by Israel; R&D projects with the Israeli government or complicit Israeli academic institutions or corporations ; “study abroad” schemes at Israeli universities, etc. The full guidelines are available on:

<https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/academic-boycott-guidelines>

The academic boycott as part of the BDS movement

Launched in 2004, the **Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)** calls on the international community to boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions.

It is rooted in the **BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) campaign**, which is a non violent, legal, popular and effective Palestinian led movement. BDS demands an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and to racial discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel as well as the protection of Palestinian refugees’ rights to return to their homes.

On 26 January 2024 , the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** found it “plausible” that Israel’s acts could amount to genocide and **called upon the international community to bring an end to any complicity**. The academic boycott of Israel is therefore of utmost importance today. As researcher Maya Wind writes: “By collaborating with state apparatuses and weapons corporations that enforce Israeli apartheid, **Israeli universities function as an academic arm of the Israeli security state** and are complicit in its crimes.”

What can be done?

Talk about it, even informally with colleagues and peers. No matter how “sensitive” this topic might be, it is essential to talk about it and demystify it. You can also print and distribute this leaflet in your lab/department/university and/or share it on professional mailing lists. Organize an event about it at your lab/department/university.

Write an open letter, individually or collectively, to the leadership and international relations’ office at your university reminding the principles of the academic boycott and our moral obligation to act.



Join or start an academic boycott campaign at your university. Start looking for and enquiring about your university’s partnerships and collaborations with Israeli academic institutions and join existing initiatives regarding the academic boycott at your university. If none exist, look for peers and colleagues interested in this topic to start a campaign.

Stay informed, by subscribing to social media accounts such as @studentsforpalestinefinland and @tutkijatpalestiinanpuolesta as well as those of BDS @bdsnationalcommittee



4 COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL

1 “Israeli universities are not involved in Israel’s occupation regime and settler colonialism” .”

False. Several Israeli universities have been built on occupied territories and illegal settlements on lands that used to belong to Palestinians and were seized from them. For example, the Hebrew University participated in the seizing of Palestinian land in occupied East Jerusalem, and some of the student accommodation are located within an illegal Israeli settlement. The public university of Ariel was built on the illegal settlement of Ariel in the West Bank. **Israeli universities also play a key role in the oppressive system imposed on Palestinians and are deeply connected to the army and military establishment.** For example, Technion (Israel Institute of Technology) develops military drone technologies and remote controlled weaponized bulldozers used to demolish Palestinian homes. As Michael Federmann, CEO of Elbit Systems puts it: “The Technion is woven into Elbit’s DNA”. **Israeli universities have also played an important role in the elaboration of the military ideology and doctrine:** among other examples , the “Da yhiya doctrine”, which calls for the use of disproportionate force against civilian infrastructure and is leveraged to justify the massacres in Gaza , was conceived in the University of Tel Aviv. **A significant number of programmes in universities are also directly sponsored by the Israeli army.**

2 “The academic boycott is unfair: It punishes individual Israeli scholars and students for the wrongdoings of their universities”

The academic boycott is mainly aimed at institutions, not individuals. PACBI guidelines stress the following: “Anchored in precepts of international law and universal human rights, the BDS movement, including PACBI, rejects on principle boycotts of individuals based on their identity (such as citizenship, race, gender, or religion) or opinion. If, however, an individual is representing the state of Israel or a complicit Israeli institution (such as a dean, rector, or president), or is commissioned/recruited to participate in Israel’s efforts to “rebrand” itself, then her/his activities are subject to the institutional boycott the BDS movement is calling for. Mere affiliation of Israeli scholars to an Israeli academic institution is therefore not grounds for applying the boycott.”

3 “The academic boycott is counterproductive: By fostering a space for discussion and debates, universities can play a key role in promoting the peace process and helping ‘both parties’ to find a common ground”

False. This misconception is rooted in the idea that Israeli universities offer a space for open and democratic debates on equal grounds, whereas there is clear evidence of systemic discrimination against Palestinian students, including in Haifa University which is often hailed by Israeli intellectuals as particularly inclusive. The systemic racism taking place in universities or generally within the Israeli education system has been documented by NGOs such as ACRI (The Association for Civil Rights in Israel) and in a study conducted by Human Rights Watch (further information available on the BDS website and the resources referenced below). In light of such systemic oppression, the university cannot be considered as a space of dialogue between two symmetric and equal “parties”.

4 “The academic boycott is incompatible with academic freedom”

False. As previously mentioned, the academic boycott is not incompatible with the pursuit of constructive academic debates with Israeli scholars (as it mainly targets institutions, not individuals). Furthermore, the boycott is an effective means of pressure towards Israeli universities to encourage them to reform themselves until they can genuinely safeguard academic freedom on their campuses . Many researchers deemed too critical of Zionist ideology have been marginalized, such as the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, himself an advocate of the academic boycott of Israel. His work on the Nakba of 1948 led him to endure multiple harassment campaigns and disciplinary proceedings, until he decided to leave Israel in 2006. Universities do not support and, in some cases, publicly disavow scholars who fall victim to intimidation campaigns and harassment through media, or even receive death threats as was the case for the Palestinian professor of social work and law and feminist scholar Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian (Hebrew University) in 2019. In April 2024, Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian was arrested by Israeli police, questioned on her scientific work, tortured and released. Additionally, **all the debates on the threat posed by the boycott on academic freedom generally focus on the academic freedom of Israeli scholars (or scholars from western countries affiliated to universities with partnerships with Israel) and completely ignore the academic freedom of Palestinians,** For decades, Palestinian universities have been subjected to several constraints imposed by the military occupation obstructing their right to participate in international academic exchanges . Since October 7th 2023, ALL universities in Gaza have been bombed and partially or entirely destroyed.