

As they face arrests, destruction and massacres, SUD éducation stands with Palestinian higher education staff and students

Statement by the SUD éducation trade union branch at Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 in Montpellier, France

Universities under occupation

Going to university and carrying out the teaching and research activities that normally characterize university life are, for our Palestinian colleagues and for the students at Palestinian universities, a daily challenge in the face of the obstacles and humiliations imposed by the occupying Israeli forces. In 1988, Birzeit University in the West Bank launched the Right to Education campaign, at a time when Palestinian universities had been closed down by the occupying Israeli military authorities and teachers and students who transported textbooks or organized clandestine courses were prosecuted. Since then, our colleagues in Birzeit have been documenting Israel's systematic attacks on higher education in the West Bank and Gaza: students and members of staff prevented from accessing their places of study by the military check-points and the illegal Wall inside the West Bank; military raids on campuses; students detained and humiliated. As recently as Sunday 24 September 2023, the University of Birzeit, which is situated north of Ramallah in the West Bank, was attacked by Israeli military forces, who assaulted security personnel and detained 8 students.

A wave of Israeli attacks against higher education in the West Bank and Gaza

Since 7 October 2023, the State of Israel has stepped up its attacks on Palestinian universities, as part of its larger military offensive against Gaza, with attacks increasing as well in the West Bank. Figures compiled by the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, dated 30 October 2023, showed that 427 students and 12 members of staff at Palestinian universities had been killed by Israeli army bombs and bullets – a figure that the authorities are now struggling to update due to the destruction of Gaza's communications infrastructure. Also as of 30 October, 11 higher education buildings had been completely or partially damaged, including nine in the Gaza Strip and two in the West Bank, as a result of Israeli attacks. Teaching has now been completely interrupted at 19 higher education institutions in Gaza since mid-October, preventing 88,000 students from studying for their degree. 555 students from Gaza, who had planned on enrolling at higher education institutions abroad, have been prevented from doing so. In the West Bank, in-person teaching has been severely disrupted at 34 higher education institutions by the check-points, raids and attacks conducted by the occupying Israeli military forces, affecting their 138,800 students.

In the West Bank and inside Israel, Palestinian students facing threats and dismissals

In Israeli universities, almost 200 Palestinian students have been disciplined for comments or publications critical of Israel's attack on Gaza, or for taking part in peace demonstrations, often following denunciations encouraged by the university authorities. At least 40 have been dismissed from higher education institutions. On October 28, Israeli police in Netanya had to intervene to stop several hundred far-right militants who were trying to force their way into a university residence housing Palestinian students, while chanting "Death to the Arabs". In the West Bank, Israeli military

authorities have arrested several dozen students in raids carried out since 7 October 2023: students have suffered intrusive body-searches and ill treatments and more than a dozen of them are still being held in administrative detention.

Growing international academic solidarity

In the face of occupation, destruction and massacres, our Palestinian colleagues are calling for international solidarity, as the Union of Teachers and Employees at Birzeit University and Birzeit students have done, and the international academic community is indeed mobilizing in solidarity with Palestine. Groups of academics from the USA, Australia, Belgium, the UK, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Uruguay have declared their support for the Palestinian people and their condemnation of the massacre committed by the Israeli armed forces. In many higher education institutions in the US, students have expressed their fury with the US administration's complicity with Israel's far-right government by demonstrating on and off campuses.

The members of the SUD éducation trade union branch at Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 in Montpellier, France :

- **condemn the destructive and murderous campaign of the State of Israel against the Palestinian people and the attacks on Palestinian higher education institutions, staff and students ;**
- **offer their condolences to the friends and families of the students and staff members killed, and affirm that they stand with Palestinian higher education staff and students in the face of arrests, destruction and massacres ;**
- **call for solidarity to be expressed at all levels in our own institutions and organisations with our Palestinian colleagues and with Palestinian students, and for links with them to be strengthened ;**
- **call for the strengthening, in universities and on the streets, of the international movement for peace and solidarity with the Palestinian people.**