Academia for Equality’s Report on the State of War and Political Persecution in Academia

November 13, 2023
**General Review:**

Since the war broke out, disciplinary procedures have been opened against over 120 students. These were and are subjected to processes of hearings, inquiry, disciplinary committees and even suspension from their universities and colleges. This storm erupted at the Haifa University, which announced it had suspended 6 students, and summoned more students to hearings at disciplinary committees. In response, a group of lecturers (numbering about 25 staff members) sent a protest letter to the University Directorate about this immediate suspension that took place on October 8th without any inquiry and disregarding the rules and authority vested in the university rector. He then demanded that the deputy rector who signed the letter resign, and threatened the signatories. Only publication of the petition by right-wing organisations, who demanded that all 25 signatories be dismissed forthwith, caused the rector to think twice. At the same time, the disciplinary committees established that suspensions announced by the rector are null and void until the end of the inquiry.

The tensest arena is that of university and college students - for that matter there are not only police arrests but also persecution by the university directorates, even following the most innocent publications, in what appears to be an attempt to appease pressure by rightist organisations and other students. Persecution does not only follow publications – it notes even a “Like” or follows a page that posts items identified with the Palestinian struggle.

On October 18, 2023, Education Minister Yoav Kisch passed a resolution at the Council for Higher Education demanding institutions to take immediate steps such as suspension or strong disciplinary measures against students who “expressed support of terrorism or identification with Hamas and the Islamic Jihad”, threatening sanctions against universities who would not follow suit. Kisch also passed a resolution at the Council demanding institutions to report on their treatment of complaints they receive. The heads of universities strongly attacked this move, and wrote to Kisch that such a resolution “might create an air of McCarthyism and mutual informing on campuses”.

Weeks after the Minister of Education resolved to demand universities and colleges to report to the Council on their treatment of complaints about students who allegedly supported terrorism or Hamas, on November 6, 2023, Kisch - in his capacity as chairman of the Council of Higher Education - instructed the Council’s CEO Varda Ben Shaul to suspend implementation of this resolution until further discussion of the matter.

Suspensions and disciplinary summons targeted not only hundreds of students – this policy reached even members of the teaching staff. Since war broke out, about 6 lecturers and
junior staff members[1] have been summoned to disciplinary committees or were suspended de facto until their cases are finalised. The claim against them was that they had expressed support of Hamas actions or incited against IDF soldiers.

The case of professor Nurit Peled-Elhanan - winner of the Sakharov Human Rights and Freedom of Thought Award of the European Parliament, and a bereaved mother – embodies this kind of persecution: several hours after she sent a message in the private Whatsdapp group of lecturers at Jerusalem’s David Yellin College of Education, Professor Nurit Peled-Elhanan already received an email notifying that she was suspended. Grounds: “Expression of support and justification of the terrorist acts of Hamas”. Incriminating evidence: Her paraphrase of philosopher Jean Paul Sartre’s words. Last week’s correspondence in the Whatsapp group dealt with the video posted on it, comparing the Hamas acts to Nazism. After being informed of her suspension, Peled-Elhanan was summoned to a hearing – in writing – at the end of which the college directorate resolved to reprimand her for what was described as “an expression of solidarity with the worst of Israel’s enemies”.

A similar case is that of Doctor Warda Sa’ada, of Kaye College, who was dismissed after 28 years and the same number of years as activist in organisations of peace and co-existence in the Negev. She received a disciplinary summons by the college directorate, claiming that “via social media, and by posting encouraging and praising words, she glorified those terrifying terrorist deeds”. Dr. Sa’ada did attend the hearing accompanied by an attorney, but her hearing was concluded with her being dismissed de facto. 3 more cases of staff members are now undergoing similar hearings, among them Dr. Faten Massarwa of the same institution, for old posts from May 2021. This policy has also been applied to Dr. Uri Horesh, a lecturer at Ahva College, was suspended and then permanently dismissed without any initial procedures.

Another case at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, shows that lecturers threatened with dismissal underwent a hearing or similar procedure without being dismissed: Last week, on October 29, 2023, the university directorate strongly reprimanded member of staff Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian who distributed a petition calling for the immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and wrote that Israel was conducting “genocide” in the Gaza Strip. In a letter sent to Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, University President Professor Asher Cohen and Rector Tamir Shefer wrote that they “are sorry and ashamed that the Hebrew University employs such a staff member” and added their belief that it would be appropriate for her to
consider resigning her post. This letter from the university directorate urged Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian to resign and was then distributed to all Hebrew University staff members. [2]

**Numerical data:**

As of November 6, 2023, the ‘Academia for Equality’ has been collecting and reviewing all references to summons and disciplinary action. There are over 120 students who have been either suspended until disciplinary action is taken or summoned to a disciplinary procedure. These are present in all institutional spaces and one can safely generalize and state that political persecution and such summons take place mainly in the various colleges. Haifa University has 7 suspended students, the rest have been summoned for disciplinary action; Tel Aviv University has 5 students summoned for disciplinary action; Ben Gurion University has 4 students summoned, and the Technion – 5. It should be noted that there are in fact only 5 outstanding cases of students who received a letter informing them that “they are suspended or distanced from studies de facto” and/or “are dismissed from their studies”. Specifically, these letters arrived from the Rishon Le’Zion College of Administration (according to Attorney Adi Mansour, Adalah Center).

A report we received from Tel Aviv University (by Professor Gadi Algazi) informed us of 5 valid complaints against students “identifying themselves with terrorism”; 3 of them were significant – 2 Palestinians and one Jew out of 30,000 students; authorities requested the court’s permission to suspend these students until disciplinary inquiry be completed. Let it be emphasised that many of the complaints were false. There are also complaints by Palestinians against Jews, and “it will be looked into” – meaning that no measures have been taken so far.

In the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Dr. Tamar Berger reported that 57 of its Arab students met with a psychologist who works with other institutions as well and says that the situation at Bezalel is the harshest – 7 suspensions and 14 summons to face the disciplinary committee. These numbers are steep considering that the student body numbers a mere 2,500, of whom only 220 are Arabs. The practice, it appears, involves searching very old posts by students on social media, that serve as grounds for complaints.

About 35 concerned students turned to the ‘Academia for Equality’ hotline. Most of them needed legal advice, while the rest included cases of persecution on social media (incitement, libel and defamation) – namely, such that required emotional assistance and contact with lecturers in the various institutions aiming to create a security and support
network on our part. We were approached mostly by students of the following institutions: Tel Aviv University, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Zefat College, Ben Gurion University, Sapir College, Beit Berl College, Bar Ilan University, Ahva College and other private colleges.

**Mapping the main characters:**

‘Academia for Equality’ has maintained a “hotline” since the events of May 2021, in order to provide an answer and accompaniment to students who face hardships related to the political context. Along with the rise to power of the extreme right, there is concrete fear of increased political persecution of activist students. In face of the ongoing war and the de facto McCarthyism resulting from October 7th, hundreds of students of all institutions of higher education were and still are exposed to harassment and political persecution by members of right-wing organisations inside the institutions and outside, expressed by de facto suspension or disciplinary summons.

Palestinian citizens of Israel are arrested, summoned to disciplinary action or suspended from studies for publicising almost anything. This is an unprecedented situation of incitement and suppression of all freedom of expression and solidarity. Concerned about the escalation of such political persecution of Palestinian activists, we wish to bring to your attention the existence of our hotline, in case you or your friends need it. The team members answering such calls are members of the ‘Academia for Equality’ – an organization aspiring to promote equality and representation in academia of all the populations living in the country, a struggle for the involvement of Israeli academia against the ongoing state persecution of territories occupied in 1967, against exploiting authority relationships, sexual harassment and the silencing of any criticism of Israeli policies.

Hence, ‘Academia for Equality’ has allotted a budget of 2-3 months for the job of administering the hotline. Yara Shahine-Gharable has been appointed to coordinate the ‘Academia for Equality’ hotline. During the first month of the war and until now, the organisation has dedicated its efforts to administer current work of the hotline: a team answers calls and is manned by members of the organisation, maintaining the hotline on the phone and on Whatsapp for those interested in writing, both in Hebrew and in Arabic. We have also collaborated with a wide range of organisations. We document these applications and follow their progress.
Furthermore, during the second week of the war, on October 15, 2023, the ‘Academia for Equality’ organised an emergency meeting with students and teaching staff in the various institutions following the general atmosphere of incitement against Palestinian-Arab students and the policy of the State of Israel, threatening the students with suspension and inciting against them on social media. Thus, ‘Academia for Equality’ expressed its blatant objection to any kind of harm to the Palestinian-Arab students and lecturers’ freedom of expression and academic and political freedom. The purpose of the meeting was to enable a space of listening, a show of solidarity and a discussion of modes of action and future steps to ensure freedom of expression and academic freedom.

In addition to the above-described encounter, the ‘Academia for Equality’ organised an emergency meeting with staff members at institutions of higher education to conclude three weeks of the war (October 26, 2023), to face the state of lecturers in Israeli universities and colleges. Most of this meeting was supposed to enable the sharing of various persecution cases and the disciplinary summons that staff members received – or were to receive - from various directorates.

Concluding this report, the ‘Academia for Equality’ organisation has dedicated tremendous and consistent efforts to continue formulating, writing and coordinating applications arriving by monitoring the hotline, as well as by any other body that makes contact with the student and staff member communities. The ‘hotline’ has given legal assistance (when relevant) transferred directly to Adalah Center[3] with which we work in close cooperation, initiated and promoted by members of our organisation – Dr. Areej Sabagh-Khoury and Dr. Karin Levy. The emotional and supportive accompaniment is given by the hotline team. Their purpose is to obtain legal opinion in case of need, and moreover – intervention inside the system vis-à-vis the various authorities as well as contacts among peer students facing similar difficulties. The basic idea is for the targeted students not to remain alone and unsupported.

We are collaborating with the High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel, student ‘cells’ throughout the country’s institutions of higher education,[4], attorney members of ‘Academia for Equality’ among whom are attorney Abir Baker (head of the Human Rights Legal Clinic at Haifa University) and attorney Sausan Zahar (Tel Aviv University’s Legal Clinic), as well as the Adalah Center.
Since the first week of the war, the High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel announced the appointment of a special committee to monitor cases of students persecuted and harassed by their universities and colleges. The High Follow-up Committee’s team on Arab education matters held a work and coordination meeting to monitor the persecution of Arab students at institutions of higher education in Israel, and to coordinate efforts to cope with incitement of organisations and individuals of the right who are exploiting the war in order to pressure academic institutions to expel Arab students.

The special committee includes representatives of several institutions active in this realm, among them Adalah centre, Musawa Center for the Rights of Arab Citizens of Israel, Almizan Human Rights Center, ‘Academia for Equality’ Organization, the Association for Arab Culture, Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Associations of ‘Ufuq-Sikui’ and ‘Alma’ali’, in addition to the representatives of the High Follow-up Committee’s team on matters of Arab Education, the Arab Education Council, various student movements and Arab lecturers.

As of the date of the present report, please note that on Thursday morning, November 9, 2023, the Israel Police arrested members of the Palestinian leadership during a demonstration that day. This was a demonstration protesting the outbreak of war on Gaza, planned to take place in Nazareth – and before it even began the chairman of Balad party Sami Abu Shehada, former Knesset Member of that party Haneen Zoabi, Former Knesset Member Dr. Matanes Shehada, and former Knesset Member of the Hadash party and present chairman of the High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel Mohammad Barakah were arrested and detained for police questioning. “They are trying to organise a demonstration that might lead to incitement and disturbance of public order” - this was the police claim explaining the detention.

אקדמיה לשוויון

אקדמיה לשוויון

https://www.academia4equality.com/ info@academia4equality.com
2 cases at Kaye College, one case at Ahva College, one case at the David Yellin College of Education, one case at the Hebrew University, and one case at the Tel Hai College.

It should be noted that the group of professors called Professors for a Strong Israel sent a letter to Minister of Education Kisch last week with names and affiliations of four Jewish lecturers from four institutions whom they think should be dismissed.

Adalah Legal Center for the Rights of the Arab Minority in Israel.

The said cooperation with the various cells is enabled by direct and consistent ties with Mr. Yusef Taha, an M.A. student at Tel Aviv University who coordinates the council of Arab Student Committees in the universities. This committee was founded following the breakout of the current war at a meeting of the High Follow-up Committee.
Information and data can be found at:

**Hebrew:**


אשתקד"ם. 09.11.2023.

"הפגנה הלא מוגנת של סטודנטים הערבים: מוחמד ברכה, חנין זועבי נעצרו, ראש עיתון." מושבל ומעורר.


"מכללת קי בראש ובחופשות". מחלקה ראשונה. 30/10/2023.

"הפרופסורית טענה.isTrue. האוניברסיטה מקווה שתתפטר." מקור ראשון. 29.10.2023.

"וואלה. נעצרו ו𝛾ג....". הארץ. 05/11/2023.

"האוניברסיטאות משעות סטודנטים שנטענו בתמיכה בחמאס, ומעוררות חשש למקארתיס voter". הערבי. 15/10/2023.

**Arabic:**


A collection of articles covering persecutions can be found in the following Google Docs:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1keyKgeAJk4US6uJmZdm3Xts4dXxN0XeWqFmRkNpS71U/edit#heading=h.k587fx2r9611