

To: Executive Board - Prof. dr. ir. Hester Bijl, 5.1.2e @bb.leidenuniv.nl
CC: Members of the University Council - 5.1.2e @bb.leidenuniv.nl
CC: Leids Universitair Fonds - 5.1.2e @bb.leidenuniv.nl

Leiden, 25 January 2024

Concerning: Proposal for emergency fellowships for scholars and students at risk from Gaza, the Westbank and Israel.

Dear members of the Executive Board,
CC: members of the University Council and the Leids Universitair Fonds,

In your [New Year's message](#), you reflected upon the role of Leiden University in the face of great human suffering. It is in the spirit of our core values as a connecting, innovative, responsible and free university, that we send you the attached proposal to make fellowships available for students and scholars at risk from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel. Their academic freedom and intellectual integrity has been severely curtailed and in many cases their access to education blocked altogether.

In their [call to action](#), the international organization Scholars at Risk has urged the academic community worldwide to not only protect the academic freedom at their own institutions in the face of polarization, but to also take responsibility for the academic freedom of colleagues elsewhere, for example by hosting scholars at risk.

In addition to extending the protection of academic freedom to colleagues and students at risk, hosting refugee scholars and students also allows our own academic community to connect and learn from them. Listening to their stories and exchanging knowledge and expertise will contribute to mutual understanding in this difficult moment. In the spirit of Cleveringa, a scheme like this can help further a University that is "rich in diversity."

We request that you not only make available emergency funding, but also voice your encouragement and offer institutional support for the allocation of already existing fellowships to students and scholars at risk from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel, so that colleagues working at labs and in different departments of our University are made aware of this opportunity and feel more inclined to take the extra step.

With many thanks for your attention and best wishes,

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Fellowships for scholars and students from Gaza, the Westbank and Israel A proposal for colleagues and students at risk

Leiden, 25 January 2024

This document proposes the creation of emergency fellowships for Palestinian researchers and students from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel at Leiden University.

Higher education under attack

Israeli strikes have completely destroyed or heavily damaged buildings and facilities of universities, bookstores and archives in Gaza.¹ [REDACTED] 5.1.2e [REDACTED] whose testimony has been included in the frame below, estimates that it would take at least three years to repair the damage at Universities, while reconstruction of other material damage in Gaza would take at least a decade if the war ended right now and aid and reconstruction resources were allowed in without restrictions. Reports suggest that at least 439 members of the Palestinian higher education community have been killed in the first month of violence alone and 4551 students have been killed so far.² Education, including higher education, in Gaza has come to a complete halt due to insecurity, lack of electricity and stable internet connections for online education, and shortages of basic necessities, such as water, fuel and food. In the West Bank, the escalation in violence and travel restrictions have forced higher education to move completely online.³ In Israel, students and scholars have been suspended or harassed for expressing views opposing the Israeli bombardment of Gaza.⁴

Voices from the academic community in Gaza

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¹ See for example "The Israel–Hamas conflict: voices from scientists on the front lines" *Nature*, 16 November 2023, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-03550-0>, see also "Gaza: Universities under attack", *Morning Star*, 22 November 2023, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/gaza-universities-under-attack>.

² Wagdy Sawahel, "439 HE students and staff killed, universities hit in war", 7 November 2023, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20231107142515556>; Al Jazeera, "More than 625,000 students deprived of education in Gaza", 24 January 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/1/24/israels-war-on-gaza-live-14-killed-as-israel-hits-two-homes-in-jabalia?update=2644972>; see also "2000 students killed, 70 faculty killed, 200 schools hit", Birzeit University, *Facebook*, 20 October 2023, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=701972575295372&set=a.537980075027957&locale=ar_AR

³ Scholars At Risk Network, "Call to Action: The Crisis in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank and its Impact on Academia", 18 December 2023, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2023/12/call-to-action-the-crisis-in-israel-gaza-and-the-west-bank-and-its-impact-on-academia/>

⁴ Idem, see also <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2023/11/09/letter-to-hebrew-university-in-defense-of-prof.-nadera-shalhoub-kevorkian>; <https://bricup.org.uk/article/israel-arrests-eminant-palestinian-scientist-again/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/13/it-is-a-time-of-witch-hunts-in-israel-teacher-held-in-solitary-confinement-for-posting-concern-about-gaza-deaths>.



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These testimonies were provided at great cost due to limited Internet access and the struggle for everyday survival. 5.1.2e Leiden University, has their full testimonies, which were collected by 5.1.2e

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What can Leiden University do?

- Start a crowdfunding campaign to create new student, research and teaching fellowships for students and scholars from Gaza, the West Bank or Israel whose access to education has been largely or completely hindered. As was done for Ukrainian students, the Leiden University Fund can open an emergency fund and fundraising campaign for students from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.
- Apply for external funding to create new student, research and teaching fellowships for students and scholars from Gaza, the West Bank or Israel whose access to education has been largely or completely hindered;

- Publicly and privately encourage departments and institutes to allocate existing student funds, research fellowships, PhD positions, writer- and artist residencies to students and scholars at risk;
- Reach out to Scholars at Risk to seek advice and assistance. The European branch of SAR may also be able to coordinate multiple research fellowships across universities in the Netherlands and Flanders <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/>
- Show flexibility with admission criteria. Obtaining a work or student visa with a Leiden University fellowship will greatly help people to get out of Gaza, but many students will face additional challenges due to the collapse of the administrative infrastructure, as well as the exposure to airstrikes and other violence at all stages from the application to the eventual border crossing. Students might not be able to take online admission tests in time or get hold of the required official paperwork.
- Support incoming students and scholars from war zones with their asylum procedure, housing, (mental) health provision and set up a buddy system, in collaboration with Stichting voor Vluchteling-Studenten (UAF).
- Help rebuild education once the war is over, by donating materials, offering online courses for students, and setting up exchange programs.

Why?

- By creating emergency fellowships for, and allocating existing fellowships to students and scholars at risk, and by helping to rebuild education in Gaza once the war is over, Leiden University shows its commitment to the values of freedom of research and universal access to education.
- Hosting refugee students and scholars from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel, will facilitate opening dialogues and a disposition to foster mutual understanding in these difficult times.
- The initiative is also likely to save lives as work or student visas might help Gazans to leave that current war zone.