

Scholars at risk from Gaza and beyond

A vision for Leiden University and advice for concrete next steps

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Higher education in Gaza

- All universities, archives and libraries have been bombed and rendered inoperable.
- Necessary infrastructure is severely damaged: roads, public transportation, Internet, electricity, water, food, health care.
- Displaced Gazans have lost their material resources: laptops, books, files.
- Dozens of academics and thousands of students have been killed.
- There is evidence that suggests scholars were targeted deliberately.
- Due to violence, education on the Westbank has been severely disrupted.
- Some critical voices within Israel have encountered censorship.

⇒ Scholars and students can no longer do their work in Gaza. (Some) scholars and students in the West Bank and Israel are also at risk.

Looking ahead

- The post-war efforts at peace building and reconstruction will demand a tremendous effort in fields such as peace building, material reconstruction, rebuilding education, health care and civil society, environmental repair.
- Investment in research and education is a vital component in response to these needs and needs to start sooner rather than later.
- A temporary research fellowship or a student fellowship will allow talented researchers and students to resume their important work, to expand their networks, to exchange knowledge, experience and expertise, and to eventually return well equipped to make a contribution to the post-war development of their society.
- Leiden University, with its longstanding respectable international reputation and its motto *praesidium libertatis*, has a special duty to contribute to global efforts towards peace, freedom and justice.

⇒ Leiden University can contribute to post-war peace building and development by hosting guest researchers and students at risk from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.

Initiatives

- There are multiple inspiring bottom-up initiatives in the fields of Human Rights and international law, microbiology, political economy, sociology, and cultural anthropology at our university.
- This is part of a broader movement of scholars at Dutch Universities, at least at Wageningen University, Erasmus University, University of Amsterdam, Radboud University and the Vrije Universiteit.
- Coordinating and supporting organizations exist: Scholars at Risk, the Scholars Rescue Fund can help on an international level.
- The University of New Europe has experience with a relatively low-cost mentorship programme, run by two academics (part-time) and two full-time student assistants.

- ⇒ Leiden University can stimulate and generously enable initiatives from its employees, work together with other universities, and build upon the experience of existing organizations.

Challenges for good hosting

- It is very difficult to get out of Gaza at the moment. The Dutch embassy refuses to help Gazans with a Dutch residency permit.
 - Scholars and students from Gaza have often lost their homes and savings. They need help with finding affordable housing.
 - Scholars often have families. They need help in applying at the IND for residency status for the core family.
 - Scholars from Gaza and their families are likely in need of specialized (mental) health care due to their living under scarcity and great distress.
 - We don't know when it will be safe for them to return home. Apart from small appointments in the short term, they might need more stable positions for the longer term.
- ⇒ In addition to the challenges all migrants face (finding affordable housing, apply for "toeslagen"), Gazan scholars need additional support: for their border crossing, access to specialized (mental) health care, for perspective after the end of the temporary fellowship.

Action points

At an institutional level

- ⇒ Leiden University can stimulate and enable bottom-up initiatives from Leiden scholars;
- ⇒ Leiden University can create one or more positions top-down and advertise them with Scholars at Risk;
- ⇒ Leiden University can open and advertise special student fellowships for students at risk;
- ⇒ Leiden University can recognize that exceptional situations call for flexibility in terms of procedure (such as deadlines, documents and (online) language tests);
- ⇒ Leiden University Fund can open a permanent Scholars at Risk Fund to help covering the living expenses.

At a national level:

- ⇒ As part of UNL, Leiden University can pressure the Ministry of OCW and Internal Affairs to arrange embassy support for students and scholars with Dutch residency permits for the exit list from Gaza.
- ⇒ Together with UNL, and perhaps with support from NWO or KNAW, Leiden University can take an active role in developing a national support centre and mentor system in collaboration with UNE, Scholars at Risk and the Scholars Rescue Fund.