SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIES CALL FOR UJ TO TERMINATE RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAELI INSTITUTION

As members of the academic community of South Africa, a country with a history of brute racism on the one hand and both academic acquiscience and resistance to it on the other, we have a responsibility to you, the students of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU). The relationship agreement, presented as the ‘merely continuation’ of a ‘purely scientific co-operation’ is currently being reviewed owing to concerns raised by UJ students, academics and staff.

As academics we acknowledge that all of our scholarly work takes place within larger societal contexts – particularly in institutions committed to social transformation. South African institutions are under an obligation to revisit relationships forged during the apartheid era with other institutions that turned a blind eye to racial oppression in the name of ‘purely scholarly’ or ‘scientific work’.

The Israel occupation of the Palestinian territories has had disastrous effects on access to education for Palestinians. While Palestinians are not able to access universities and schools, Israeli universities produce the research, technology, arguments and leaders for maintaining the occupation. BGU is no exception, by maintaining links to both the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and the arms industry BGU structurally supports and facilitates the Israeli occupation. An example of BGU’s complicity is its agreement with the IDF to provide full university qualification to army pilots within a special BGU programme. Furthermore, BGU is also complicit in the general discrimination at Israeli universities against Palestinian and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

It is clear to us that any connection with an institution so heavily vested in the Israeli occupation would amount to collaboration with an occupation that denigrates the values and principles that form the basis of any vibrant democracy. These are not only the values that underpin our post-apartheid South Africa, but are also values that believe UJ has come to respect and uphold in the democratic era.

We thus support the decision taken by UJ to reconsider the agreement between itself and BGU. Furthermore, we call for the relationship to be suspended until such a time that, at minimum, the state of Israel adheres to international law and BGU, (as did some South African universities during the struggle against South African apartheid) openly declares itself against the occupation and withdraws all privileges for the soldiers who enforce it.

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