



**Universiteit  
Leiden**

**Advisory report by the Committee on Human Rights & Conflict  
Areas regarding institutional research collaborations of Leiden  
University with partners in Israel**

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## Summary

### **Mandate and scope**

The Executive Board requested the Committee on Human Rights & Conflict Areas to draw up guidance in line with the guidelines of the advice of the Temporary Committee on Assessing Ethical Aspects of Collaborations, on each of the 13 current institutional research collaborations of Leiden University with partners in Israel, and to provide advice on whether or not to enter into new institutional research collaborations with partners in Israel.

This advice encompasses all research collaborations that were known at the time when the work of the committee commenced. Institutional collaborations relate to formalised, bilateral collaborations, but also EU consortia in which a partner from Israel takes part. That is, every collaboration based on an agreement signed by the university. Individual collaborations and Material Transfer Agreements (MTAs) between researchers fall outside the scope of this study.

### **Working method**

The committee held discussions with Leiden researchers involved in the 13 research collaborations and gathered facts about the situation in Israel and the Palestine regions, as published in internationally recognised, objective and authoritative sources.<sup>1</sup> Based on the information gathered, the committee conducted meticulous and by no means straightforward deliberations, weighing all the risks against the scientific opportunities of collaboration with partners in Israel. In line with the working method devised by the temporary Committee, the factors of context, partner and activity were considered.<sup>2</sup>

### **Context**

The Committee observes that authoritative international reports and procedures contain serious and broadly documented evidence of violations of international human rights and international humanitarian rights, as well as indications of genocide. Although there is no definitive judicial determination on this matter, the Committee considers the nature, extent, and consistency of these indications to be such that they cannot be ignored when evaluating institutional collaborations. In the light of the responsibility of the university to act in accordance with human rights norms and to avoid involvement in possible serious violations of such norms, there is no requirement for an irrevocable judicial decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Reports and decisions of international and regional judiciary or supervisory bodies, such as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR), the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court.

(ICC). See references in the text and the list of literature consulted.

<sup>2</sup> The committee's investigation was concluded on 12 March 2026.

## **Partners**

The committee notes that Israeli partners, due to their institutional embeddedness, are involved in knowledge acquisition, research, industrial and logistic development, production and operational implementation that facilitate the Israeli government and the IDF. There is ample evidence that universities in Israel, including public universities, work closely with the IDF in the area of education, research and development, and knowledge sharing, and that they provide facilities and expertise for the education and training of future military personnel. Government partners are institutionally connected to the activities of the IDF, even if they themselves do not contribute to these activities. It is highly likely that, in the current Israeli context, private industrial companies in Israel contribute to the activities of the Israeli government and IDF, even if such collaboration cannot be publicly demonstrated. From this perspective, they are complicit in the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

## **Activity**

Regarding the 13 institutional collaborations, the committee has concluded that in 12 cases the research activities per se do not appear to have a direct risk element in the sense of the dual use of results.

## **Assessment**

The combination of (a) the gravity of the context – serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, including proven indications of genocide<sup>3</sup> — and (b) the close institutional interconnectedness of the partners with the Israeli government and/or the IDF, carries considerable weight. This is in part due to the fact that Leiden University is committed to respecting human rights principles and values, which is expressed in the university's policies and codes of conduct, and the establishment of dedicated bodies that safeguard responsible behaviour and collaboration. The Leiden principle of academic freedom is called into question by collaboration with partners that contribute to the structurally unbalanced power structure that results in the systematic restriction of Palestinian academic freedom. Continuing with these partnerships puts the university in a morally precarious position and brings pressure to bear on its core values.

The committee distinguishes four interrelated considerations that make collaboration morally onerous:

1. International partnerships can strengthen the economic and institutional infrastructure of Israeli partners and consequently also the actions of the Israeli government and the IDF.

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<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Council, Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. A/HRC/60/CRP.3, 16 September 2025; New York: United Nations. 16 September 2025. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds> - retrieved 16 September 2025.

2. Proceeding with these institutional collaborations or entering into new collaborations grants institutional recognition and validation to the Israeli partners. It implies that they comply with academic, ethical, legal and institutional norms and affords them the legitimacy and benefits that are associated with a globally respected academic network.
3. Providing material and immaterial support via academic collaboration projects with partners who are associated with violations of human rights or unethical practices is counter to the university's stated task of adhering to human rights principles and values, which is apparent in its policies and codes of conduct and in the establishment of dedicated bodies that safeguard behaviour and collaboration.
4. Staff in Leiden run the risk of contributing, willingly or unwillingly, to violations of human rights or international humanitarian law and committing genocide, which constitutes a moral and legal risk for the university.

These four considerations make it clear why continuing with collaborations in the present context conflicts with the core values of the university. They relate to indirect forms of involvement where an actor – even without direct causality – contributes to activities that are morally reprehensible or that facilitate or normalise such activities.

#### **Advice**

In the light of the above, the advice of the committee is:

- 1. To suspend 11 of all the current collaborations with Israeli partners until further notice and to terminate 1<sup>4</sup>.**
- 2. Not to enter into any new institutional research collaborations with partners in Israel until further notice.**

The committee advises the Executive Board, together with UNL, to contact the EC to examine whether Israeli institutions should still participate in subsidy consortia.

At least once a year, the committee will review its advice regarding current and other research collaborations with partners in Israel in the light of developments in the region.

The committee recognises that this recommendation will have serious consequences for the research conducted in Leiden. These consequences were raised during the deliberations of the committee and were given very careful consideration.

The committee emphasises that individual research contacts and partnerships of Leiden researchers with colleagues from Israeli institutions may continue, with due observance of the requirements of academic integrity prescribed by the university.

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of one programme, the committee concluded that collaboration with the Israeli partner had not materialised and that there was no obstacle to continuing the research programme.

The committee advises that, prior to any such partnerships, participants should reflect on the sensitivity of the research topic in relation to the human rights situation in Israel and, in line with current policies, consider the risks to knowledge security.

## 1. Introduction

As researchers, lecturers and students of Leiden University, we work every day with national and international partners. We make choices about with whom and on what topics we will work based on our core value of ‘academic freedom’: the freedom to ask questions, explore new ideas and share knowledge without restriction. This freedom is essential for science: for good education, to learn to think critically, to develop new knowledge and to contribute to societal advancement.

At the same time, Leiden University believes it is important to use this freedom responsibly. As ‘Academic Freedom: a Leiden Line. Final Report of the Academic Freedom Core Team’ of 17 June 2024 formulates it, ‘At the same time, [academic] freedom is not unlimited. Academic freedom is a principle that has to be weighed against other principles, norms and interests’ (p. 19)<sup>5</sup>.

Collaboration entails the responsibility to make sure that we enter into partnerships in a careful, safe and morally principled manner. That is why, in every form of collaboration, we take a conscious approach to the risks relating to knowledge security, the fossil fuel industry and human rights and international humanitarian law.

In the context of human rights and international humanitarian law, applicable in conflict regions, the following aspects are important:

- Partners in conflict areas may be involved with or may work with institutions that are guilty of or that benefit from violations of: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)<sup>6</sup>
- The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)
- The four Geneva Conventions (Geneva Conventions) (1949)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (IVBPR)<sup>7</sup>
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (IVECSR, 1966)<sup>8</sup>
- International Covenant on the Banning of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (IVUR)<sup>9</sup>

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Guiding Principles, UNGPs)<sup>10</sup>, businesses and institutions have the responsibility to:

- Implement human rights due diligence
- Avoid/prevent complicity in human rights violations through their partnerships, and
- Be transparent with regard to the risks of involvement in unlawful activities

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<sup>5</sup> See also ‘Revision of Regulations on Academic Education (Higher Education and Research Act 1981)’, Parliamentary Papers II, 1980-1981, 16 802, no. 3, pag. 51 (‘The research to be carried out must comply with social and ethical standards’).

<sup>6</sup> (New York, 10 December 1948).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations 1966a, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (New York, 16 December 1966), Treaty series. 1978, 177.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, 1966b, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (New York, 16 December 1966), Treaty series. 1978, 177.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, 1965, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (New York, 21 December 1965), Treaty series. 1966, 13.

<sup>10</sup> [UN Human Rights Council \(2011\)](#)

Public or semi-public institutions that enter into contractual relations, operate internationally, carry out economic activities (research funding, valorisation, technology transfer), employ staff and manage supply chains fall functionally within the scope of the UNGPs and are expected to implement due diligence<sup>11</sup>.

Although the UNGPs do not mention universities explicitly, the committee considers that universities as public institutions are obliged to comply with the Geneva conventions and other international treaties<sup>12</sup>.

International humanitarian law, or the laws of armed conflict, as laid down in the Hague Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land (1907),<sup>13</sup> the four Geneva Conventions (1949), and customary international humanitarian law<sup>14</sup>, prohibits the collective punishment of civilians (article 49 GCIV), and disproportionate military force against civilian targets (Rule 14 of the ICRC study on customary law)<sup>15</sup>. According to international humanitarian law, an occupying power is obliged to guarantee public order and safety, protect the population and their rights, and preserve the cultural and material heritage, while refraining from exploitation, destruction or structural changes that are not strictly justified as a military necessity.<sup>16</sup>

## **2. Urgency of evaluating institutional collaborations with partners in Israel**

The primary task of the university is to facilitate research and education; international collaborations are crucial to this task. The committee recognises the importance of keeping the lines of communication open as a form of science diplomacy. At the same time, in international

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<sup>11</sup> The UNGPs are not binding in the strict sense of treaty law and are primarily aimed at commercial companies. Leiden University is a public institution, the primary task of which is education and research. There are problems with this legal-technical argument: (1) The UNGPs are regarded internationally as the standard for responsible conduct of organisations that have societal and economic impact, and (2) universities often appeal explicitly to human rights, societal responsibility and impact; failure to apply the principles of the UNGPs is then inconsistent. The UNGPs are regarded as soft law, but they do constitute a broadly recognised international standard of care. In practice, the UNGPs also function as a management standard. Failure to adhere to these can engender a risk to reputation, funding and collaboration. It is important to realise that the question ultimately is not whether a university is a business, but whether it can cause, contribute to, or be associated with human rights risks; whether it enters into international collaborations in conflict contexts; and whether it has economic and societal impact. If the answers to these questions are affirmative, there is a responsibility to implement due diligence, regardless of the formal legal qualification.

<sup>12</sup> The committee has also taken note of the report on Israeli-Dutch academic relations (Independent Expert Committee on Israeli Dutch Academic Ties, 2025), but does not adopt the provisions on legal obligations, and instead adheres to the UNGPs.

<sup>13</sup> Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land (The Hague, 18 October 1907). Also referred to as the Hague Regulations (1907) or Regulation relating to the laws and practices of war on land (1907), Appendix to the Fourth Hague Convention, 18 October 1907.

<sup>14</sup> ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law Database, available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl>.

<sup>15</sup> Rule 14, Customary International Humanitarian Law Database ('Proportionality in Attack'), available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule14>.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977, Parliamentary Papers 1951, 80–83 and Parliamentary Papers 1978, 58–59.

cooperation, the university adheres to the norms relating to human rights, ethical and security considerations, academic freedom and scientific integrity. If there are concrete signs that partners may be violating those norms, this requires a case-by-case assessment.

The requirement to implement human rights due diligence in national and international cooperation applies for all collaborations, irrespective of the country or the partner. For several reasons, the university considers it necessary to give priority to conducting a review of the nature and admissibility of its institutional collaborations with Israeli partners. The Executive Board and the committee are aware of Israel's right to self-defence following the attacks by Hamas on 7 October 2023, but share the viewpoint that this right does not justify Israel's violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. International organisations have verified large-scale human rights violations and infringements of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the committing of genocide by the state of Israel in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian areas.

Through their institutional or logistical interconnections, Israeli partners are involved via public programmes and collaboration in knowledge acquisition, research, industrial and logistical development, production and operational implementation, all of which facilitate the activities of the Israeli government and the IDF. There is ample evidence that universities in Israel, including public universities, work closely with the IDF in the context of education, research and development and knowledge sharing, and that they provide facilities and expertise for the education and training of military personnel. Government partners are institutionally connected with the activities of the IDF even if they themselves do not directly contribute. It is highly likely that Israeli private industrial companies in the current Israeli context contribute to the activities of the Israeli government and the IDF, even if this has not been demonstrated publicly<sup>17</sup>.

### **Previous advice and follow-up**

On 8 July 2025 the Committee on Human Rights/Conflict Areas<sup>18</sup> issued the Executive Board with advice on the existing student exchange programmes with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University, and potential new student exchange programmes with other Israeli universities. Following an administrative consultation with deans, participation bodies and the Board of Governors, the Executive Board adopted this advice on 11 November 2025.

Subsequently, the Executive Board asked the committee to evaluate new and 13 already existing institutional<sup>19</sup> collaborations with Israeli partners in terms of the risk that these contribute to violations of international humanitarian law and possible acts of genocide<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> See: Evron (2025); Levaton (2025); Loewenstein (2023).

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/nieuws/2025/04/advies-tijdelijke-commissie-samenwerkingen-bekendgemaakt>.

<sup>19</sup> All the institutional research partnerships are programmes funded by the EU (See appendix 1).

<sup>20</sup> Executive Board decision 23 September 2025. The Executive Board also instructed the Committee on Human Rights/Conflict Areas to convert the working method devised by the Temporary Committee on Ethical Aspects of Collaborations (CES) into an assessment framework for human rights. This framework will follow in a separate notification for the Executive Board.

Based on the conclusions in the report of the independent international committee of enquiry on the occupied Palestinian areas, including East Jerusalem and Israel, ‘Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide’<sup>21</sup>, the committee advised that ‘Leiden University should in principle not enter into any new institutional agreements on research collaboration with Israeli partners’.

The committee prepared this remit between 23 September 2025 and 3 March 2026. The approach taken and the outcomes are described below.

### 3. Approach

#### Research collaborations evaluated

Leiden University currently has 13 ongoing research programmes known to the committee with Israeli partners, all of which are funded by the EU: the partners are universities, companies and a ministry. In 11 of the 13 research programmes, Leiden University is a partner in a consortium; in one programme Leiden University is coordinator and in one programme Leiden University has temporarily taken over the coordinator role from the Israeli partner. In one of the 13 programmes, it appears that the participation of the Israeli partner has not actually taken place. In one programme, the Israeli partner has not played an active part in the activities since 7 October 2023<sup>22</sup>. Other Dutch universities are involved in two of the collaborations<sup>23</sup>.

Two programmes relate to PhD and staff exchange programmes where training is the main activity; one programme is a network that organises scientific meetings, but does not include a specific research programme. The ten remaining programmes concern joint research activities with expected shared results, such as scientific publications, advisory reports and product development. Appendix 1 gives an overview of the research programmes<sup>24</sup>.

Besides these research programmes, Leiden University is also involved in many other formalised collaborations: these concern largely exchanges of information between individual researchers that, due to legislation relating to data and samples, have to be approved by a dean (in the case of

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<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Council, Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. A/HRC/60/CRP.3, 16 September 2025; New York: United Nations, 16 September 2025.

<sup>22</sup>

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the Faculty of Science) or the Board of Governors (in the case of Leiden University Medical Center, LUMC); these are the so-called Material Transfer Agreements (MTAs).

The committee has spoken with the three LUMC researchers who are – or were – involved in MTAs with Israeli partners, to form as complete an image as possible of this type of collaboration. As MTAs require an agreement signed by the university (or by a representative of the university), strictly speaking they fall under the definition of ‘institutional’ collaborations. From the discussions held, the committee does not have sufficient insight into the implications of these collaborations. The present advice therefore does not relate to MTAs.

The present advice also does not relate to individual, non-formalised collaborations between researchers at Leiden University and researchers at Israeli universities and knowledge institutions.

### **Assessment framework**

Academic freedom was the guiding principle in the committee’s deliberations, without this being regarded in isolation from the responsibility of universities to contribute to societally responsible research and to ensure that scientific collaboration neither contributes to serious violations of fundamental rights nor undermines our fundamental values. The committee recognises the importance of keeping the lines of communication open as a form of science diplomacy. At the same time, in its international collaborations the university adheres to the norms relating to human rights, ethical and security considerations, academic freedom and scientific integrity. If concrete signals emerge that partners may be contravening these norms, this calls for a case-by-case assessment.

The committee has conducted its examination at three specific levels (context-partner-activity), in line with the method drawn up by the Temporary Committee on Assessing Ethical Aspects of Collaboration<sup>25</sup>, which has also been applied in the previous advice on student exchange programmes with two Israeli universities. The committee gathered facts and references at these levels, which together form an equilateral triangle. There is neither a fixed order nor a fixed hierarchy among the three levels according to which a partnership is assessed. The three levels are examined for each collaboration.

In terms of the context, the committee used formal reports of internationally recognised organisations (such as the UN Commission on Human Rights, the International Criminal Court, the Internal Court of Justice and internationally recognised human rights organisations).

In terms of the partners, use has been made of national and international reports, scientific publications, websites and information provided by the Leiden University researchers involved.

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<sup>25</sup> See the [advice](#) of the temporary committee on the Leiden University website.

Where applicable, use has also been made of research carried out by human rights committees of other Dutch universities.

To gain a picture of the research activities, the committee has taken note of the programme descriptions of all the research collaborations and has spoken with one or more Leiden researchers from each research programme (including from LUMC). During the discussions the following issues were addressed: the research context, how the collaboration came about, the dynamics in the consortium, institutional considerations, ethical and knowledge security implications of the research, wishes regarding the human rights policy of Leiden University and the possible consequences of suspending current collaborations and a ban on future collaborations. These discussions were held in confidence and the present advice does not refer to specific comments made during the discussions, so that they cannot be traced back to individual researchers.

#### 4. Context

In line with the working method proposed by the temporary committee on ethics, the committee first considered the context, where the obligation to carry out due diligence in the UNGPs, as described in paragraph 1, was paramount. Below is a description of the context since the publication of the earlier advice on student exchange programmes.

On 16 September 2025, a report<sup>26</sup> by the Independent International Commission of Enquiry<sup>27</sup> on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, was published that has an influence on the context of the situation in Israel-Palestine.

In this report the UN Commission of Enquiry concluded that ‘the State of Israel bears responsibility for the failure to prevent genocide, the commission of genocide and the failure to punish genocide

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<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Council, *Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.* A/HRC/60/CRP.3, 16 September 2025; New York: United Nations. 16 September 2025. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds> - retrieved 16 September 2025. Amnesty International has recently reported on the consequences of acts of genocide for women in Gaza. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/03/israels-genocide-in-gaza-inflicts-compounded-harms-on-women/> - retrieved 10 March 2026.

<sup>27</sup> The Independent International Commission of Enquiry of the UN on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel was established on 27 May 2021 by the UN Human Rights Council ‘to investigate all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law that have taken place in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel up to and including 13 April 2021.’ Resolution A/HRC/RES/S-30/1 further called on the commission of inquiry to ‘investigate all underlying causes of recurring tensions, instability and the continuation of the conflict, including systematic discrimination and oppression on the basis of national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.’

against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip’ (page 71, paragraph 255). According to the report, four of the five legally recognised crimes of genocide are taking place: murder, causing serious physical or mental harm, deliberately bringing about the deterioration of living conditions and measures aiming to prevent births. According to the committee, there is evidence of both policy-related acts and statements by Israeli leaders aimed at destroying (parts of) the Palestinian population. In the report, reference is explicitly made to the deliberate destruction of cultural and educational structures and facilities (HRC 2025:56-57; Canfield et al, 2025).<sup>28</sup>

In her recent report<sup>29</sup> from October 2025, special rapporteur Francesca Albanese also focuses attention on complicity in genocide, which extends beyond state actors. She has examined how non-state entities, such as academic institutions, contribute to genocide in Gaza. This broadening of the focus also relates to debates on the academic collaboration between European universities and Israeli scientific organisations.

In her earlier report in June 2025<sup>30</sup>, she already explicitly criticised universities – in particular Israeli faculties of law, archaeology and Middle Eastern studies – because they contribute to the ideological basis of apartheid and occupation. She emphasises that these academic institutions contribute to the production of knowledge, technologies and narratives that legitimise and maintain the Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories. Albanese regards academic partnerships not as purely neutral exchanges, but as violations that make structural violence possible - and consequently scientific collaboration contributes to human rights violations.

On 22 October 2025, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was published on the obligations of Israel relating to the presence and activities of the United Nations, other international organisations and third-party states in and relating to the occupied Palestinian territory. The ICJ has determined that Israel, as the occupying power and UN member state, must facilitate access to and distribution of essential services – including humanitarian assistance – via UN organisations, international organisations and third countries; Israel must also safeguard the protection of citizens, respect international humanitarian law and human rights, and guarantee the privileges and immunities of UN agencies<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> See also the Leiden research project *Picturing Scholasticide: The Future of Higher Education in Palestine* of Matthew Canfield, Nadia Sonneveld, Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela and Elisa Da Vià. As part of this project, an exhibition (*Picturing Scholasticide: Het beschermen van kennis, cultuur en levens*) was organised at the university in June 2025.

<sup>29</sup> Albanese, Francesca, 2025, *Gaza Genocide: a collective crime, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in de Palestinian territories, occupied since 1967*, 20 October 2025, A-80-492.

<sup>30</sup> Albanese, Francesca, 2025, *From economy of occupation to economy of genocide. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*, 30 June 2025, A-HRC-59-23.

<sup>31</sup> International Court of Justice, 2025, *Third Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 22 October 2025, The Hague.

Although the advice is not binding, it offers a powerful clarification of the applicable international legal obligations and bears considerable moral and legal weight. In a press release, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) judged Israel's recent decision to no longer extend permits of 37 critical humanitarian actors, such as Doctors without Borders and Oxfam, whose services continue to be indispensable, to work in Gaza, a decision that resulted in international outrage<sup>32</sup>.

According to the most recent update (reporting period closed on 10 December 2025) of the UN organisation the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Health Department in Gaza (MoH) reported 70,369 deaths and 171,069 wounded since 7 October 2023 (cumulative, as reported by the MoH)<sup>33</sup>. On 22 August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) declared a famine situation in parts of Gaza and warned aid organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF that large parts of the population were experiencing acute food insecurity and the risk of starvation<sup>34</sup>.

The advice of the ICJ of 22 October 2025<sup>35</sup> confirmed the ongoing obligations of Israel as the occupying power in the Palestinian territories. It emphasised the obligation of Israel to supply essential goods (food, water, medicines, etc.) and to facilitate humanitarian assistance. Israel ignored this, which has resulted in famine and displacement. The advice stressed<sup>36</sup> the unlawful restrictions that Israel is imposing on UNRWA and other aid organisations, and demanded that international humanitarian law must be observed, including the banning of starvation as a method of war and the safeguarding of the basic rights of Palestinians.

Satellite assessments from the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) and cluster reports show that a very large proportion of the buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged<sup>37</sup>. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported at the start of November 2025 that after two years of war and heavy bombardments, the education system in Gaza is on the point of collapse<sup>38</sup> and UN

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/israel-ban-37-aid-groups-makes-life-unbearable-genocide-survivors-palestine> - retrieved 28 January 2026.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-347-gaza-strip?> – retrieved 15 December 2025.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/09/children-gaza-hospitalised-acute-malnutrition-un-says?> – retrieved 15 December 2025; <https://www.unicef.org/media/173726/file/State-of-Palestine-Humanitarian-SitRep-31-July-2025.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> International Court of Justice (2025).

<sup>36</sup> [UN Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the obligations of Israel in relation to the presence and activities of the United Nations, other international organizations and third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, A/80/502, 22 October 2025.](#)

<sup>37</sup> UNOSAT estimates (based on satellite analyses) that around 78–81 per cent of the structures have been damaged and speak of tens of thousands of damaged or destroyed homes (UNOSAT *damage assessment*). Earlier OCHA cluster data even talk of around 436,000 damaged or destroyed homes (equating to around 92 per cent). Retrieved 15 December 2025; retrieved 15 December 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Over 97 per cent of the schools have been damaged or destroyed, and 91.8 per cent of all educational institutions will have to be completely rebuilt or extensively renovated in order to be operational again. Most

experts have expressed their concerns about scholasticide.<sup>39</sup> Also, as regards health care in Gaza, there have been numerous reports and warnings about the dire humanitarian situation, which is spreading to the West Bank.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas since January 2025, violence and unrest are still occurring regularly. The IDF is carrying out bombings and attacks on Palestinian civil targets in Gaza. The IDF, together with colonists, is inflicting fatalities on the West Bank. Israeli military acts, arrests and confiscation of land and property in the Palestinian areas are growing, thus increasing the violence and lack of safety for Palestinian residents<sup>41</sup>. The report of the UN Human Rights Office (January 2026) describes the stifling impact that the laws, policy measures and practices of Israel are having on every aspect of the daily life of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem<sup>42</sup>.

## 5. Partners

The research programmes evaluated relate to collaborations with universities, companies and a ministry in Israel. The committee has taken note of as much publicly available background information as possible regarding these partners. In the case of universities, the focus was on the institution as a whole and, where possible, also on the specific department within the institution with which we collaborate.

In the light of the public information found on the partners in Israel, the committee has concerns regarding all the partners. In the case of the universities, there are structural links with the army, security services or weapons industry, and with university policy or practices that conflict with international human rights and international humanitarian law. There are also universities that are

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of the 658,000 school children have already had limited access to formal education for over two years. See <https://www.unicef.org/sop/stories/after-two-years-war-gazas-education-system-brink-collapse> – retrieved 12 December 2025.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>. – retrieved 7 July 2025. See also UN Human Rights Council, 2025. Finally, the committee refers to the 'Picturing Scholasticide': Preserving knowledge, culture, and lives' project and exhibition of Leiden researchers Nadia Sonneveld, Matthew Canfield, Elisa Da Via and Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela. This project was made possible with a KIEM subsidy from Leiden University.

<sup>40</sup> <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/emergencies-trauma-care/who-phsa-opt-111125-final.pdf> - retrieved 12 December 2025. See also Reliefweb, the information platform of OCHA: Retrieved 12 December 2025, en <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/occupied-palestinian-territory-crisis-response-plan-2026> - retrieved 11 December 2025; <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-345-gaza-strip> - retrieved 11 December 2025; and ICRC Retrieved 11 December 2025; [www.unocha.org/news/todays-top-news-occupied-palestinian-territory-ukraine-29](http://www.unocha.org/news/todays-top-news-occupied-palestinian-territory-ukraine-29) - accessed on 15 December 2025; <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-348-west-bank> - retrieved 15 December 2025.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-295-west-bank?> – retrieved 11 December 2025.

<sup>42</sup> UN Human Rights Council (2026).

actively involved in military R&D, surveillance or repression technology, or the training and support of armed forces.

As regards the companies, it is clear to the committee that [REDACTED] is involved in human rights violations in the form of the use of natural resources from the occupied Palestinian territories<sup>43</sup>. For the other two companies, [REDACTED], no plausible evidence has been found that they are involved in human rights violations.

The committee has noted the protests among scientific colleagues at Israeli universities. In an open letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the five presidents/chairmen of Weizmann Institute of Science, Hebrew University, Open University of Israel, Tel Aviv University, and Technion called on him to put an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and to accept the moral responsibility to prevent cruel and indiscriminate harm being inflicted on non-combatant men, women and children<sup>44</sup>. The President of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities warned in a statement that the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza strip that is threatening the lives and health of hundreds of thousands of people cannot be ignored<sup>45</sup>. The committee has taken into account the limited possibilities for academics and administrators to express criticism of the actions of the IDF and the policies of the Netanyahu government.

Appendix 2 gives a description per partner institution of the involvement identified – and the risks of involvement – in human rights violations.

## 6. Activities

With regard to the research activities, the committee has found considerable diversity in the themes, nature and anticipated results of scientific research: work is being carried out in the area of theoretical mathematics and physics, scientific approaches of [REDACTED], biodiversity research, and theoretical approaches to tipping points in ecosystems, but also diabetes, cardiovascular conditions and cancer. The envisaged results are not only scientific publications, but also a module in a digital platform and a toolbox relating to the potential environmental effects of particular chemical substances.

Three of the collaborations examined are networks where the emphasis is on the exchange of staff and building a network<sup>46</sup>. Only in the PhD network is there a direct exchange of knowledge in the form of peer review meetings<sup>47</sup>. In the case of this last network, the committee noted that the collaboration relates to a very sensitive scientific topic, with the risk of dual use. This is [REDACTED]

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<sup>43</sup> [REDACTED]

<sup>44</sup> <https://english.tau.ac.il/presidents-letter-on-famine-in-gaza> - retrieved 15 December 2025.

<sup>45</sup> <https://academy.ac.il/News/NewsItem.aspx?nodeId=837&id=3227> – retrieved 15 December 2025.

<sup>46</sup> [REDACTED]

<sup>47</sup> [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The committee considers that the legal, ethical and reputation-related risks of this collaboration are too great<sup>48</sup>. [REDACTED] is in the case of the Israeli partners — [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] — directly related to the IDF and the security services, because the [REDACTED] research at [REDACTED] is part of a scientific genre that applies a military-oriented approach to security and is strongly focused on the law in relation to war and conflict situations.

The other twelve programmes relate to topics and activities that are not demonstrably high-risk in terms of dual use or possible misuse of data or results.

In the case of one of the research programmes, in which there is close collaboration with another Dutch university, given the situation in Israel, this Dutch university has assessed the research for knowledge security risks and not found this to be problematic<sup>49</sup>. In the case of the second research programme involving several Dutch universities, two Dutch universities have indicated that they wish to terminate the collaboration because of the participation of the Israeli partner. Both universities are still investigating whether and in what way the termination can be arranged legally and administratively<sup>50</sup>. Appendix 3 describes the research activities of the thirteen programmes.

## 7. Balancing of considerations

The committee emphasises that the deliberation process has been exceptionally complex, because fundamental values such as academic freedom, scientific progress and societal responsibility are in tension with one another in the case at hand. In this light, the discussions surrounding the drawing up of the advice have been conducted with great care and circumspection and in full awareness of the possible far-reaching consequences.

The primary focus in the committee's deliberations was academic freedom, without regarding this in isolation from the responsibility of universities to contribute to societally responsible research and to prevent scientific collaboration from contributing to serious violations of fundamental rights or undermining our fundamental values. In doing so, the committee recognises the importance of keeping the lines of communication open as a form of science diplomacy. At the same time, in its international partnerships the university adheres to norms of human rights, ethical and security considerations, academic freedom and scientific integrity. If concrete signals emerge that partners may be contravening these norms, a case-by-case assessment is needed.

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<sup>48</sup> This is in contrast to the approach of the Leiden researchers who conduct research [REDACTED] from a legal perspective, representing the EU or continental approach.

<sup>49</sup> [REDACTED]

<sup>50</sup> [REDACTED]

The committee based this assessment on two criteria: necessity and proportionality. In assessing the necessity of collaboration, the central question is whether the academic and societal aims of the projects can be achieved in a comparable and scientifically responsible manner without collaboration with the relevant partner. While the Committee acknowledges that collaboration with Israeli institutions may have specific advantages and that the criterion of necessity may be met, it nevertheless questions whether this necessity carries sufficient weight to justify a form of collaboration that, in the light of the prevailing context, entails significant moral risks.

The committee distinguishes four related risks that make the collaboration morally charged:

1. International partnerships can strengthen the economic and institutional infrastructure of Israeli partners and consequently also the actions of the Israeli government and the IDF.
2. Proceeding with these institutional collaborations or entering into new collaborations affords the Israeli partners institutional recognition and validation. It also implies that they meet academic, ethical, legal and institutional norms and gives them the legitimacy and benefits associated with a globally respected academic network.
3. Providing material and immaterial support via academic collaboration projects with partners who are associated with human rights violations or unethical practices contradicts the remit that the university sets itself to commit to observing human rights principles and values, which are expressed in the university's policies and codes of conduct and in the establishment of special bodies that safeguard responsible conduct and collaboration.
4. Staff at Leiden who take part in such collaborations run the risk of contributing to violations of human rights or international humanitarian law, and committing genocide, which involves a moral and legal risk for the university.

These risks correspond with different indirect forms of involvement – material, structural and symbolic – where an actor, without direct causality, can contribute to morally problematic practices or facilitate or normalise such practices. This makes it clear why continuing collaboration with these partners in the current context is at odds with the core values of the university: such forms of direct or indirect involvement normalise practices that conflict with these values.

Given the fact that collaboration with these partners in the current context conflicts with the core values of the university, the question arises of whether the scientific benefits of these collaborations outweigh the moral costs associated with continuing with them. In this proportionality consideration, the committee concludes that preventing harm to third parties and upholding our own moral integrity carries greater weight than the possible benefits.

Preventing moral harm therefore requires a reappraisal of the involvement of Leiden University in these collaborations. The committee considered two options: suspending the institutional collaborations or minimising Leiden's involvement in them. The committee believes that minimising, or some other less drastic measure than suspension, is not an effective way to avoid

moral harm. Every form of continuation of the collaboration implies indirect involvement in morally problematic practices and therefore impinges on the moral integrity of the university. As moral integrity demands that distance is maintained from such practices, and because this distance is only meaningful if it is accompanied by consistent conduct, the committee concludes that suspending the collaboration is the only responsible option.

## 8. Advice

The committee notes that the collaboration partners in Israel, insofar as they are interwoven with the Israeli government, the IDF or the Israeli defence industry, even if they are not directly involved in, nonetheless indirectly support the violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide by Israel. Given the current context in which the Israeli government is pursuing an active policy of involving civil industrial partners in the military industry, and the general context in which it cannot reasonably be expected that a private industrial party is not in some way or another embedded in or involved in activities of the Israeli government and the IDF in particular, this also applies for private industrial partners for whom it is not publicly clear that they are (now) actively involved in such activities.

The committee is of the opinion that continuing with existing collaborations or entering into new collaborations under such circumstances constitutes a moral (and possibly also legal) risk for Leiden University, which would put the university in a morally precarious position and raise questions about its moral agency and integrity.

Although in 12 of the 13 collaborations, the research activity per se does not appear to pose a direct risk, in view of the seriousness of the context (high plausibility of serious human rights violations and infringements of international humanitarian law with proven indications of genocide) and the connectedness of the partners with the Israeli government or the IDF, the committee advises as follows:

1. **Out of all current collaborations with Israeli partners, 11 should be suspended until further notice and [REDACTED] should be terminated.<sup>51</sup>**
2. **Until further notice, no new institutional research collaborations with partners in Israel should be entered into.**

The committee advises the Executive Board, together with UNL, to contact the European Commission to examine whether Israeli institutions should still participate in subsidy consortia.

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<sup>51</sup> In the case of one programme, the committee concluded that collaboration with the Israeli partner had not materialised and that there was no obstacle to continuing the research programme.

The committee is prepared at least once a year to reconsider its advice relating to research collaborations (current or otherwise) with partners in Israel in the light of developments in the region.

The committee emphasises that individual research contacts and collaborations of Leiden researchers with colleagues from Israeli knowledge institutions should be permitted provided there is no contractual obligation and the relevant scientists in Israel are not demonstrably directly or indirectly involved in human rights violations.

The committee urges researchers prior to entering into any such collaboration to reflect on the sensitivity of the research theme in relation to the human rights situation in Israel and to always take the knowledge security risks into consideration.

The committee recognises that this recommendation has serious consequences for the research conducted in Leiden. These consequences were raised during the consultations of the committee and were given careful consideration.

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