

## ADVICE OF THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND DUAL-USE RESEARCH ON COLLABORATIONS WITH ISRAELI ENTITIES

16 MAY 2024

Like many colleagues and students, the members of the Committee on Human Rights Policy and Dual-Use Research are shocked by the human suffering in Gaza in recent months. United Nations figures show that,

- more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed and 77,000 injured since the start of this war - seventy per cent of them women and children. That means five per cent of Gaza's 2.2 million residents have been killed or wounded in six and a half months. 19,000 children in Gaza are now orphans;
- 1.7 million people - more than 75 per cent of the population - have been displaced from their homes in Gaza.
- humanitarian assistance for civilians in emergency situations is very much hampered;
- 62 per cent of homes in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, including 221,000 houses that have been completely destroyed. That's more than a million people made homeless by Israeli bombing;
- civilian infrastructure has been destroyed. There is hardly any electricity in Gaza apart from generators or solar power, clean drinking water is very limited, and most roads are badly damaged;
- 26 of 36 hospitals are completely out of order in a country where tens of thousands of people are now sick and injured. Ten hospitals are partially functioning, but they are overrun with people who are sick and injured. All of them are short of medical supplies. Only two hospitals providing maternity care remain in Gaza, where up to 180 women give birth every day. In total, 84 per cent of Gaza's health services have been damaged or destroyed, and more than 400 health workers have been killed;
- the education system collapsed, with 56 schools destroyed and 219 damaged. Gaza's last university was destroyed in January. 60% of educational facilities, including 13 public libraries were destroyed. Some 625,000 students now have no access to education.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sources, all originating from the United Nations: <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-104-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-Jerusalem>, <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-100-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-Jerusalem>, <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-99-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-Jerusalem>, <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-86-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-Jerusalem>, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>, [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa\\_gaza\\_sitrep\\_90\\_15march\\_2024\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_gaza_sitrep_90_15march_2024_eng.pdf), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148716>.

Given the importance of human rights and the observation that the current war is accompanied by grave violations of international humanitarian law, we continue to urge our governments to work towards a ceasefire.

Ghent University wants to avoid violating human rights, wants to avoid its research results being misused later for human rights violations and, as an institution, does not wish to cooperate with organisations (academic institutions, companies, etc.) involved in serious or systematic human rights violations.

This means, for example, that Ghent University does not wish to discriminate, that it does not want research results to end up in technology used for internal repression, and that it does not wish to cooperate with organisations that systematically restrict academic freedom.

If there is a risk that a candidate partner is involved in serious human rights violations, the institutional research or education cooperation proposal must be submitted to the Committee on Human Rights Policy and Dual-Use Research, which will screen the candidate partner to the best of its ability and assess, on the basis of all elements at its disposal at that point in time, whether the candidate partner risks being involved in serious human rights violations.<sup>2</sup> If so, the Committee on Human Rights Policy issues a negative advice. Over the years, negative advices were issued on collaborations with organisations in numerous countries, both in Belgium, in Europe and beyond. With regard to Israeli partners, this concerns Ariel University, the Israeli police, the Jewish National Fund and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The recommendations issued on the basis of this human rights policy have so far always been adhered to by the rector.

Given that human rights violations are prevalent in the region, all collaborations with Israeli organisations are, in principle, submitted to the Committee on Human Rights Policy for an advice.

In late 2023, the committee advised to no longer have new collaborations with Volcani Centre and MIGAL Galilee Research Institute. These research institutes fall under the Ministry of Agriculture<sup>3</sup> and the Ministry of Science and Technology<sup>4</sup>. This connection with the government was problematic for the Committee, given the Israeli government's actions in Gaza after 7 October 2023. At the time, it was known that the Holon Institute Industrial Design Department was organising workshops to develop materials (including waist bags, holsters, paramedic bags and protective vests) for units of the Israeli army, police and fire brigade. It ruled that providing material support to the army for actions in Gaza was problematic. The negative opinion was not issued due to a risk of human rights violations in the existing collaborations between Ghent University and the organisations, nor because the results could be misused, but because of the partners' indirect involvement in the Israeli government's human rights violations.

When the Human Rights Commission issues an advice, this advice must be proportionate and duly motivated. A candidate partner that does not itself violate human rights but is only indirectly involved in human rights violations by others may be judged differently from a partner that itself systematically violates human rights. Besides involvement in human rights violations, the severity of human rights

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<sup>2</sup> There are additional requirements for dual-use research. See [https://ugentbe.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet-  
onderzoek/SitePages/Onderzoek-naar-dual-use-items.aspx](https://ugentbe.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet-onderzoek/SitePages/Onderzoek-naar-dual-use-items.aspx) (intranet).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.agri.gov.il/en/home/default.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.migal.org.il/en/about>

violations is also important. When entering into collaborations with academic organisations, attention is also paid to the academic freedom of the researchers: collaborations established by one research department often have little or no bearing on the research conducted by another department within the same institution. Moreover, in multi-partner projects, often with many dozens of partners and work packages, collaborations are usually only undertaken with a limited number of project partners.

The rector recently asked whether the advice issued by the Committee on Human Rights Policy in late 2023 regarding Volcani Centre, MIGAL Galilee Research Institute and Holon Institute was still in line with the university's human rights policy. The Committee considered this question at its meeting on 16 May 2024. The negative opinion in late 2023 only referred to future collaborations. Given the escalation of the war and the scale of human rights violations in Gaza, the Committee has now decided that its negative advice should also pertain to multilateral collaborations that are currently ongoing.

The Committee therefore recommends that for ongoing projects involving one of these three partners, the necessary steps should be taken within the consortium to see if cooperation with the relevant Israeli partner can be discontinued. If this is not the case, Ghent University should take the necessary steps to withdraw from the project itself. Evidently, this should be done with the utmost care for the researchers and promoters involved, taking into account the contractual obligations.

The Committee is very well aware that such discontinuations must be addressed cautiously, as they can have major repercussions on our own researchers (including PhD students) who are prevented from doing their research, on contractual obligations and possible loss of funding, and on relationships with other partners in the project (which are not involved in human rights violations). Moreover, the impact of withdrawing from a multi-partner project on the problematic partner itself may be rather limited. Nevertheless, the Commission considers discontinuing current collaborations justified considering the escalation and scale of human rights violations occurring.