

Statement by a collection of individual members of the Stellenbosch University Senate on the ongoing genocide in Gaza

The following statement was submitted for discussion to the Stellenbosch University Senate. We are awaiting a special meeting of the Senate to further debate the matter. The signatories below have signed in their individual capacity as members of the SU Senate.

We note that the University of Cape Town and the University of Western Cape have made official statements calling for a ceasefire and immediate aid to Gaza.

We, a collection of individual members of the Stellenbosch University Senate, note with deep concern the ongoing massacre and continued mass displacement of the population of Gaza by the Israeli military since 7 October 2023.

We are appalled by the mass killing of innocent civilians and are dismayed that the Israeli military has targeted non-combatants in Gaza – men, women and children – in their retaliation against Hamas.

We note and mourn the deaths of Israeli civilians in the 7 October attacks on Israel by Hamas. However, no crimes inflicted on Israeli civilians nor any military action taken by Israel, whether in self-defence or in pursuit of its military objectives, can ever justify genocidal actions in retaliation.

This level of destruction is brutal and barbaric. The extreme trauma of the surviving population continues to worsen as they bury their dead and fear for their lives. The universities in Gaza have been destroyed, some of which were destroyed after their capture by the Israeli military. They are being used as detention centres or military bases.

On 26 January 2024, in recognition of the extreme gravity of the situation in Gaza, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israel to "take all measures within its power" to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of Article II of the Geneva Convention on the basis that it was plausible that Israel was committing genocide in its attacks on Palestinians in Gaza.

A [recent report](#) on the ongoing devastation in Gaza highlights that "Israel has [razed 77 percent of healthcare facilities](#) in Gaza, 68 percent of telecommunication infrastructure, nearly all municipal and governmental buildings, commercial, industrial and agricultural centers, almost half of all roads, over 60 percent of Gaza's 439,000 homes, 68 percent of residential buildings — the bombing of the Al-Taj [tower in Gaza City on Oct. 25, killed 101 people](#), including 44 children and 37 women, and injured hundreds — and obliterated refugee camps. The attack on the [Jabalia refugee camp](#) on Oct. 25 killed at least 126 civilians, including 69 children, and injured 280. Israel has damaged or destroyed [Gaza's universities](#), all of which are now closed, and 60 percent of other educational facilities, including 13 libraries. It has also destroyed at least [195 heritage sites](#), including 208 mosques, churches, and Gaza's Central Archives that [held](#) 150 years of historical records and documents."

Arguing that Israel is committing genocide has been treated by some university and state authorities as hate speech and/or antisemitism. We now know, from a legal perspective, confirmed by the highest court in the world, that there are plausible legal grounds to argue that a genocide is, in fact, taking place.

Yet the repression of public criticism of Israel remains profound and widespread by labelling any criticism of Israeli actions as antisemitic.

On 25 March, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) demanded an immediate ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the release of all hostages.

As members of the Stellenbosch University Senate, we note:

1. The mass killings of Palestinian civilians, teachers, educators, professors, health care workers, students, learners and patients;
2. The absolute devastation of the education system, both basic and higher education in Gaza, since Israel's attack in October 2023;
3. The unjustified but widespread clampdown across the world on legitimate public criticism of Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and on its conduct of the war in Gaza and the false conflation of such legitimate criticism with antisemitism;
4. That the devastation of an education system may contribute to the destruction of a group's culture, religion, and identity and therefore comprise a form of cultural genocide;
5. That criticism of the extent of destruction of civilian infrastructure and the killing of teachers and university staff in Gaza is not an act of antisemitism.

As a collection of individual members of the Stellenbosch University Senate we believe that:

6. It is unacceptable to suppress legitimate criticism of parties' behaviour in the Gaza War, particularly when the ICJ has found plausible evidence of a genocide taking place in Gaza;
7. The manipulation of the definition of antisemitism to include any criticism of Israel or Zionism is both intellectually without foundation and a violation of academic freedom;
8. The academic freedom to voice opinions in scholarly and public debates on Gaza must be defended as a matter of principle;
9. Colleagues who have suffered discrimination and harassment as a result of speaking out against the invasion deserve our support and protection;
10. The evidence suggesting that the destruction of Gaza's education systems was a deliberate plan of the Israeli military must be examined by the ICJ in its determination of genocidal intent;

As members of the Stellenbosch University Senate we:

11. Call for an immediate ceasefire and the cessation on attacks on civilians, the passage of humanitarian aid and the return of all captives.
12. Condemn the destruction of the education sector in Gaza and the massive scale of killing of teachers and university staff in the current war.
13. Urge the international community to ensure that the provision of humanitarian aid includes the restoration of the education sector in Gaza

14. Express our concern and opposition to any attempts to curtail academic freedom by labelling criticism of Israel or Zionist policies as antisemitism.
15. Express our support for academic colleagues in Gaza who are surviving under appalling conditions and our intention to assist in the rebuilding of the academic sector after the war.
16. Express our solidarity with academic colleagues victimised for their willingness to speak out against the educide in Gaza.
17. Urge our colleagues at Stellenbosch University and all other institutions of higher learning not to knowingly enter into relations, or continue relations with, any research group and/or network that includes current members of the Israeli Defence Force, and/ or any member of the broader Israeli military establishment.

1. Professor Ashraf Kagee, Department of Psychology
2. Professor Desmond Painter, Department of Psychology
3. Professor Pieter Fourie, Department of Political Science
4. Professor Sally Ann Murray, Department of English
5. Professor Juliana Claassens, Faculty of Theology
6. Professor Jeremy Punt, Department of Old & New Testament
7. Professor Geo Quinot, Department of Public Law
8. Professor Reggie Nel, Faculty of Theology
9. Professor Mawande Dlali, Department of African Languages
10. Dr Leslie van Rooi, Senior Director; Social Impact and Transformation
11. Professor Ronelle Carolissen, Department of Psychology
12. Professor Lize van Robbroeck, Department of Visual Arts
13. Professor Anita Cloete, Department of Practical Theology and Missiology
14. Professor Mehita Iqani, Department of Journalism
15. Professor Aslam Fataar, Department of Education Policy Studies
16. Professor Nuraan Davids, Department of Education Policy Studies
17. Professor Amanda Gouws, Department of Political Science
18. Professor Herman Wasserman, Department of Journalism
19. Professor Faadiel Essop, Division of Medical Physiology
20. Professor Mark Tomlinson, Institute for Life Course Health Research
21. Professor Leslie Swartz, Department of Psychology
22. Dr Therese Fish, Vice Dean of Clinical Services and Social Impact, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
23. Professor Ian Couper, Ukwanda Centre for Rural Health, Department of Global Health
24. Professor Steven Robins, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

25. Professor Robert Vosloo, Department of Systematic Theology & Ecclesiology
26. Professor Tina Steiner, Department of English
27. Professor Susan van Schalkwyk, Centre for Health Professions Education
28. Professor Louis Jonker, Department of Old and New Testament
29. Professor Soraya Bardien, Department of Biomedical Sciences
30. Professor Jonathan Carr, Department of Medicine
31. Professor Mias de Klerk, Stellenbosch Business School
32. Professor Razeen Davids, Division of Nephrology
33. Mr Rubeshan Nayager, Unit Manager: BMRI Biorepository, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
34. Professor Sadulla Karjiker, Department of Mercantile Law, Faculty of Law
35. Professor Marlo Möller, Department of Biomedical Sciences
36. Professor Craig Kinnear, Department of Biomedical Sciences
37. Professor Karen Esler, Dept. Conservation Ecology & Entomology
38. Dr Mareli Pretorius, Department of Drama
39. Professor Mark Swilling, Centre for Sustainability Transitions
40. Professor Sandra Liebenberg, Chair in Human Rights Law, Department of Public Law
41. Professor Johann Mouton, CREST
42. Professor Lesley Le Grange, Department of Curriculum Studies
43. Professor Tania Ajam, School of Public Leadership
44. Ms Ellen Tise, Senior Director: Library and Information Services
45. Ms Miriam Hoosain, Chief Director, Human Resources
46. Professor Zwelinzima Ndevu, School of Public Leadership
47. Professor Savel R Daniels, Department of Botany and Zoology
48. Professor Catharine Esterhuysen, Department of Chemistry and Polymer Science
49. Professor Johann Rohwer, Department of Biochemistry
50. Ilhaam Groenewald, Chief Director, Maties Sport
51. Reagan Johnson, SRC Executive
52. Amory Smith, AAC Representative
53. Professor Samantha Sampson, Department of Biomedical Sciences
54. Professor Michael Cherry, Department of Botany and Zoology
55. Professor Wikus van Niekerk, Dean of Engineering (on sabbatical)
56. Professor Lou Marie Kruger, Department of Psychology
57. Professor Heather Brookes, Department of General Linguistics

58. Professor Lambert Engelbrecht, Department of Social Work
59. Professor Clive Gray, Division of Immunology, Biomedical Research Institute
60. Professor Nadine Bowers Du Toit, Faculty of Theology
61. Professor Donita Africander, Department of Biochemistry
62. Professor Bruce Anderson, Department of Botany and Zoology
63. Professor Christine Lochner, Department of Psychiatry
64. Professor Soraya Seedat, Department of Psychiatry
65. Professor Stefan Gebhardt, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
66. Professor Louise du Toit, Philosophy Department
67. Professor Grant Theron, Department of Biomedical Sciences
68. Professor Henk Botha, Department of Public Law
69. Professor Bernard Wessels, Department of Private Law
70. Professor Lana van Niekerk, Division of Occupational Therapy
71. Professor Sarah Skeen, Institute for Life Course Health Research, Department of Global Health
72. Professor Janis van der Westhuizen, Department of Political Science
73. Professor Xikombiso Mbhenyane, Division of Human Nutrition
74. Professor Sophie von der Heyden, Department of Botany and Zoology
75. Professor Peter Mallon, Department of Chemistry and Polymer Science
76. Professor Paramespri Naidoo, Department of Chemical Engineering
77. Professor Vasti Roodt, Department of Philosophy
78. Professor Novel Chegou, Department of Biomedical Sciences
79. Professor Corne Schutte, Vice-Dean: Research and Industry Liaison, Engineering
80. Professor Marianne Strydom, Department of Social Work
81. Professor Anna-Maria Botha, Genetics
82. Professor Lynette van Zijl, Computer Science
83. Professor Léanne Dreyer, Department of Botany and Zoology
84. Professor Estelle Swart, Department of Educational Psychology
85. Professor Liezel Frick, Centre for Higher and Adult Education
86. Professor Bob Mash, Department of Family and Emergency Medicine
87. Professor Juanita Pienaar, Department of Private Law
88. Professor Thuli Madonsela, Centre for Social Justice
89. Professor Selwyn Mapolie, Department of Chemistry
90. Professor Regan Solomons, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health

91. Professor Gunnar Sigge, Department of Food Science
92. Professor Anna-Mart Engelbrecht, Department of Physiological Sciences
93. Dr Susan Hall, Department of Philosophy
94. Professor Kathryn Chu, Centre for Global Surgery
95. Professor Kopano Ratele, Department of Psychology
96. Professor Emanuel Bylund, Department of General Linguistics
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102. Professor Andrew Whitelaw, Division of Medical Microbiology
103. Professor Bernard Dubbeld, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology