

Proposed Guiding Principles for Israeli/Palestinian Academic Cooperation: Translating the Shared Adherence to Academic Freedom into Action

International referential framework

This joint document is inspired by:

1. Our shared endorsement of the right to education, in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 26, 10 December 1948): *Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*
2. Our shared commitment to academic freedom as endorsed by the International Association of Universities. The principle of academic freedom can be defined as the freedom for members of the academic community – scholars, teachers and students – to follow their scholarly activities within a framework determined by that community in respect of ethical rules and international standards, and without outside pressure. Rights confer obligations. These obligations are as much incumbent on the individuals and on the university of which they are part, as they are upon the state and society.
3. The call of the Constitution of UNESCO adopted in London on 16 November 1945: *That a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.*

Preamble

After years of violent conflict, academics and intellectuals globally and in our own societies are expressing the hope that Palestinian and Israeli institutions of higher learning can fulfill their social responsibility and contribute their share towards a just peace (a peaceful solution accepted by the two sides). This hope and sense of responsibility generate the following frame of reference:

1. Cognizant that our special responsibility emanates from our privileged access to higher education, the development of the spirit of inquiry and of independent thinking.
2. Mindful of our universal mission to develop intellectual, cultural and scientific knowledge and progress in accordance with human rights principles.
3. *Stressing that cooperation among equals requires that the nations involved can fulfill their self-determination, and that as members of our society we stand up in defense of such principle for the parties involved.*

~~3-4~~. Recognizing that universities can play a major role through research, teaching and service to the community in developing human and cultural understanding between the two peoples, and transfer knowledge, science and technology.

- ~~4-5.~~ Aware that our common cultural heritage, that is the three monotheistic religions of our nations, has been in the past a cradle of civilizations.
- ~~5-6.~~ Understanding that joint cooperation needs to be based on the principles of equality, reciprocity, dignity, tolerance and mutual respect.
- ~~6-7.~~ Accepting that in the pursuit of such principles we should avoid all forms of harassment, exploitation, intimidation, discrimination, and any abuse contrary to ethical commitment and precepts.
- ~~7-8.~~ In recognizing the need to bridge the gap, the ties are to be based not on dominance but on equality, mutual assistance and solidarity. Based on such concern to promote joint scientific and academic projects for the interest of all parties in the Middle East, higher education should be recognized as a major instrument of the fight against inequality among nations, people and groups.
- ~~8-9.~~ Calling upon all academics, scientists and intellectuals to work actively for the creation and the preservation of full conditions whereupon no institution, researcher or student whatsoever will be discriminated against and all will have full and free access in the pursuit of their academic activities, whether on the national, regional or international level.
- ~~9-10.~~ Whereas this set of principles is steeped in the shared values of human rights, democracy and peace as a common denominator, there is a need to translate that dialogue into action in a way that can overcome existing obstacles. While the respect of the following proposed principles may be at this time more relevant to Palestinian and Israelis, we adhere to their universal jurisdiction.

Values

The principles for dialogue and cooperation articulated in section D are anchored in the following sets of suggested values:

1. *Academic values.* As academics we are committed to act according to our professional duties, protect freedom of thought, openly share information with each other, and take responsibility for what we say. We are committed to conducting accurate, serious and objective research and engaging in ongoing learning. We will stand in solidarity with other academics on the same piece of land in the protection of their academic freedom.
2. *Humanistic values.* We value democracy, equality, and freedom. We value wide participation, social openness, and are willing to cooperate with a diverse range of people with differing opinions. We are committed to promoting non-violence within our own society and to rejecting occupation and dominance.
3. *Relationship values.* We recognize the difficulties in the history of our relationship with each other, and are committed to addressing the problems of asymmetry and reciprocity. We are committed to working towards forgiveness, and express our commitment to working with each other for peace. We are committed to try to understand the needs, concerns and positions of the other side, and to network with each other rather than conduct parallel projects. Furthermore, we will utilize transparent means for resolving our conflicts.
4. *Financial values.* We commit to working for our common goals and not personal or sectarian gains. We will not change our vision based on funding availability and will use funds appropriately.

Proposed principles

- (a) Guarantee the freedom of teaching and speech, cherish the value of tolerance towards divergent opinions, make clear statements against the use of the pretext of freedom of speech for incitement to violence, promote non-violence in the campuses and community and across the divide.
- (b) Ensure the freedom of movement of academics, which for years has been curbed both in terms of their participation in international conferences overseas, as well as in their access to any areas within their own countries and the inability to meet with their own peers.
- (c) Insist on the respect for the universal right to education. Free access should be respected for students to be able to attend classes without arbitrary permits, thus allowing them to move within and between their *countries*, homes and universities. Given the delay and the humiliation of permit allocation, the process negatively affects the morale of the students, saps their time and energy and is an affront to human dignity.
- (d) Insist that the value of academic freedom can best be achieved when institutional autonomy is ensured and when there is no interference from external authorities.
- (e) Refrain from closing universities, as this form of collective punishment negatively impacts on both learning and research. Restricting and preventing access to centres of knowledge only increases the level of hatred and exacerbates the conflict.
- (f) Protect and welcome academics and students who adhere to the universal respect for human rights and who wish to visit each other at their respective campuses.
- (g) Stimulate a dialogue about the responsibilities and consequences of shared adherence to the universal standards of academic freedom as articulated in this document and elsewhere.