



Conference Summary Report

Responding to ‘Scholasticide’ in Gaza: The Role of the UK International Education and Training Community

On 18 November 2024, the conference *Responding to ‘Scholasticide’ in Gaza: The Role of the UK International Education and Training Community* convened in London and online via Zoom. Organised by UKFIET, Fobzu, CIRE (University of Bristol), and the REAL Centre (University of Cambridge), the event brought together Palestinian academics, UK-based academics and education experts. Through two sessions and breakout discussions, attendees explored the devastating impact of the ongoing genocide on Gaza’s education system and developed actionable recommendations to address the crisis.

Central to the conference was the Emergency Committee of Gaza’s Universities, the official body mandated to collectively represent Gaza’s three major non-profit universities—the Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University of Gaza, and Al-Aqsa University. Its representatives delivered urgent appeals for support to rebuild Gaza’s education sector.

Session 1: Responding to ‘Scholasticide’ in Higher Education: Testimonials and Calls from Palestinian academics

Chaired by **Omar Shweiki, Director of FOBZU**, the session featured representatives from the Emergency Committee of Gaza’s Universities - a body established by the three main public non-profit universities in Gaza with a formal mandate to coordinate support for the university sector. They provided firsthand accounts of the destruction and resilience within Gaza’s higher education sector, issuing calls for international support.

- **Dr Radwan Abu Rukba (Al-Aqsa University)** joined the session from an internet café in Khan-Younis despite immense danger and infrastructural collapse. He described the acute psychological impact of the war on students and academics, many of whom face panic, trauma and PTSD. Despite these challenges, Dr Abu Rukba called for immediate infrastructural support, including reliable internet access and academic tools. He stressed, however, that a permanent ceasefire remains the most critical need.
- **Dr Nasreddine Almezaini (Islamic University of Gaza)** detailed the extensive damage to Gaza’s universities, estimating €200 million in infrastructure losses and reporting the killing of 119 academics during the ongoing genocide, including three university presidents and tens of thousands of students. He emphasised the historical resilience of Gaza’s universities and urged international partnerships to safeguard these institutions.

- **Dr Ahmed Abu Shaban (Al-Azhar University)** highlighted the operational paralysis caused by the genocide. Universities are reliant on student fees that are no longer sustainable. Faculty continue to teach voluntarily without pay. He advocated for scholarships within Gaza to sustain local institutions, proposing, “One \$100,000 scholarship abroad could fund 100 students here, strengthening our universities and community.” He highlighted the importance of [lsnad](#) as a model for empowering Gaza’s universities.
- **Dr Mezna Qato (University of Cambridge)** provided a historical lens, emphasising that “scholasticide” is deeply entrenched in the Zionist project and did not begin in October 2023. Despite this systematic destruction, Palestinians have historically innovated in education as a means of resilience. She argued for a reframing of education.
- **Dr Abdel Razzaq Takriti (Rice University, Texas)** critiqued Western academia for normalising and even rewarding genocide through its complicity. He urged academics to reject collaboration or normalisation with Israeli institutions and advocated for collective, rather than individual, support for Palestinian academic institutions. He also noted that the term “scholasticide” has unique legal standing, distinguishing it from related terms like “educide”.

Session 2: Palestinian Schooling Under Attack—What Is to Be Done? The role of the international community

Chaired by **Professor Pauline Rose (University of Cambridge)**, this session addressed the broader crisis in Gaza’s schools and the international community’s role.

- **Unai Sacona (UNRWA’s Deputy Director of Education)** described the unprecedented destruction of Gaza’s schools, 93% of which Israel has destroyed or damaged. He appealed for international advocacy against the attacks on UNRWA, stating, “We need you to talk on our behalf.” Sacona highlighted the dual role of schools as shelters, emphasising the urgent need for safe learning spaces and psychosocial support for students and teachers.
- **Professor Yusuf Sayed (University of Cambridge)** presented findings from the REAL Centre and Centre for Lebanese Studies’ report [Palestinian Education Under Attack in Gaza](#). The report outlined five years of lost learning due to COVID-19, the May 2021 war, and the ongoing genocide, compounded by the minimal allocation of humanitarian aid to education (3.5%). Despite these challenges, teachers remain committed, offering foundational learning and recreational activities amidst the war. The report concludes with recommendations for all actors to support efforts at resuming equitable and quality education in Gaza.
- **Ayman Qwaider (Enabling Education Network)** stressed the need for equitable partnerships to rebuild Gaza’s education system and the importance of centring Palestinian voices in education recovery efforts.

Breakout Group Discussions

Participants formed five breakout groups to address the priorities for supporting Gaza's education sector. Recurring recommendations included:

- **Academic Partnerships:** Develop sustainable collaboration models between UK and Palestinian universities, ensuring autonomy for Gaza's institutions. Create a partnership guidance framework covering teaching, research, and resource sharing.
- **Rebuilding Infrastructure:** Prioritise the reconstruction of Gaza's universities and schools, integrating trauma-informed spaces to support students and teachers.
- **Scholarships and Fellowships:** Fund scholarships for students within Gaza to sustain local institutions and provide financial support for faculty and research programs.
- **Advocacy and Documentation:** Amplify Palestinian narratives and systematically document educational destruction to hold perpetrators accountable and build global solidarity.

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

The conference reinforced the urgent need for immediate and sustained action to support Gaza's education sector. Key takeaways included:

1. **Institutional Support for Gaza's Universities:** Rebuilding and sustaining Gaza's existing universities must be a global priority. Public pledges and equitable international partnerships are essential to safeguard these institutions.
2. **Urgent support for UNRWA,** being a key provider of education for Palestinians, in order to uphold the rights and dignity of Palestinian refugees and the wider Palestinian people, as it faces a campaign to dismantle it.
3. **Scholarship Strategies:** Universities and donors should prioritise funding scholarships within Gaza, ensuring local institutions remain operational and resilient.
4. **Support Networks:** UK-based educators and academics should form a Network of Educationalists for Palestine, a collective that commits to supporting Palestinian higher education and creates a space for strong solidarity with Palestine.
5. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Faculty should engage in collective action in their home institutions, amplify Palestinian collective voices, and advocate for support for Palestinian educators and students.
6. **Mental Health and Psychosocial Interventions:** Provide trauma-informed training for educators in Gaza and create safe learning spaces for students affected by the ongoing genocide.
7. **Guidance for Partnerships:** Develop a practical guide for equitable collaboration between UK and Palestinian institutions to foster long-term sustainability and capacity building in the higher education sector.

Conclusion

The conference highlighted the existential threat to Gaza's education system, i.e. "scholasticide," and the extraordinary resilience of its academic community. The testimonies from the Emergency Committee of Gaza's Universities reinforced the critical need for institutional support, not just to rebuild infrastructure but to preserve the identity and future of Gaza's people. As Dr Abu Shaban put it, "We are here; we're not just buildings. We're a community, and we persevere."

The collective call to action emphasised the international education and training community's shared responsibility to advocate for, invest in, and partner with Gaza's academic institutions to ensure their survival and recovery.