

Our Mission

Working together to foster fairness, equality and dignity in support of the advancement of knowledge and the education of students.

☎ 02920 874443

✉ e-mail: ucu@cardiff.ac.uk

✉ 49b Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Dear UEB and Prof Lerner,

Following the point we made at the last JCNF regarding the discrepancy of the University's response to the war against Ukraine and the war against Palestine, we would like to let you know that on 16th November 2023 our branch voted a [motion in solidarity with Palestine](#) which among other things called for the union to urge Cardiff University to:

- Implement the Palestinian call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions and to divest from companies complicit in Israel's oppression of Palestinians, in line with our existing [support](#) of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).
- Express solidarity with Palestine, calling for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the Israeli state's decades-long violence against Palestinians.
- Affirm its commitment to academic freedom for those supporting Palestinians' freedom from oppression.

The student's union also passed a motion on the 23rd November 2023 for a ceasefire that included calls for:

- Cardiff SU to publicly call for immediate ceasefire, while also lobbying Cardiff University to make this call.
- Cardiff SU to call for material support to Palestinian, Israeli, Jewish, and Muslim students, as well as any others affected during this time from Cardiff University as well as other stakeholders in Wales.
- Cardiff SU to organise, support, and curate educational events and resources to bring more awareness to the conflict among the students. Important topics to consider are:
 - That Israel does not represent Judaism, and that it is anti-Semitic to presume that any Jewish individual owes allegiance to Israel, rather than it being anti-Semitic to not support Israel.
 - The difference between Israel, Judaism and Zionism, and the difference between Hamas, Palestine and Islam.
 - Not every Muslim and Arab individual supports Hamas; they stand in solidarity with the Palestinians. Supporting Palestine does not necessarily imply supporting Hamas; it means advocating for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.
 - Rise in racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic hate crimes due to people conflating pro-Palestine with pro-Hamas.

- How to spot lies, propaganda, and Zionism i.e. biblical justification of the occupation of Palestine, extent of the damage to Israel, location of Hamas bases, etc. “

In light of these, we note again that the University has not issued any statement of solidarity with Palestine or offered the same level of support to our students and staff as it did when Russia invaded Ukraine. The recent communication from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor significantly fails to address Israel's atrocities against Palestinians, referring to it instead as “the tragic events still unfolding in the Middle East”. While the issue of Islamophobia was addressed, it doesn't convey the seriousness the issue deserves at this critical juncture.

Our members, including scholars in Middle East studies and staff directly affected by the situation in Palestine, have organised a Palestine Solidarity Forum where they met with ~30, mainly Muslim, students who voiced their concerns and grievances about this issue. They reported a drastic increase in Islamophobia which many of them personally experienced, as well as growing frustration and outrage that the university didn't consider the cause of Palestinians worthy of the same treatment as Ukraine and students who sympathised with it. Some students noted how some of their lecturers acknowledged Russia's invasion of Ukraine and declared their solidarity with Ukrainians in their classes, whether verbally or in email correspondence, but have not done the same for Palestine or Gaza. While it is understandable that many staff members feel unsafe doing so in the absence of a University policy on the issue, the net result is that students feel this is tantamount to racism, whether conscious or not.

It is worth noting also that many students didn't attend the event because they feared reprisals; some have confided in us privately, sharing that their parents have advised them against wearing the Palestinian Kuffieh or participating in any activities supporting Palestine for fear of being labelled anti-Semitic, and in the case of our international students, this fear extends to getting deported. Our members are also reporting that in conversations with tutees, students in class, student events, etc, students and staff have expressed fear of talking about this, report Islamophobic backlash, social media harassment, social isolation and microaggressions.

This climate of fear is not unfounded. [This damning report](#) details how academics have reported a "culture of fear" on UK campuses, as social media surveillance, which disproportionately targets racialised academic staff and students supporting Palestine, has resulted in reports to the police, the Prevent counter-terrorism strategy and university disciplinary committees. The heavy police presence on campus during peaceful students-led pro-Palestine protests is also concerning as was the fact that university security appeared to encourage them to take a harder line with moving students off university property than police were prepared to take. There have also been instances where our members have posted fundraising efforts for Gaza on community social media and have not only had those removed but have been summoned to speak to managers about it.

Cardiff University's silence, which many view as complicity with the British government's vehement support for Israel, is harmful to those affected by the situation in Palestine, including to our Arab and Muslim communities, as well

as to Jews, particularly those who are in solidarity with Palestinian liberation, who are also facing high levels of harassment across the world. We urge the University to urgently address this and to engage with staff and students on these matters. We are happy to meet with UEB and/or the VC to discuss ways forward. Besides the resolves from the motion voted from our branch (above), other positive measures that we urge the University to take include:

- Encourage tutors to address this issue with their tutees and offer support (something our students expressed was needed);
- Encourage lecturers to acknowledge the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Palestinians in their lectures, when relevant (there should be no fear about this given that the UN has classified the situation as such and considering the many calls for decolonizing the curricula);
- Staff and students who wish to speak out in solidarity with Palestine should be guaranteed that they won't face any negative consequences or be penalised in any way by the University;
- The University can adopt this as a pressing EDI issue both for Muslim and Arab students and staff;
- Extenuating Circumstances committees should be informed of the psychological and emotional impact of this war on students, and provide them with reassurance that it will consider war-related stress, grief and/or traumatising as a valid reason for missing deadlines.
- Put in place support sessions for Muslim/Palestinian staff and students provided by specialist professionals who are well versed with Islamophobia and racial microaggressions. There are organisations in the UK providing this kind of support, including Healing Justice London and Dr. Tarek Younis. UCU would be willing to co-lead the provision of these sessions.
- Take measures to protect staff from doxxing and to support those who suffer from it.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Cardiff UCU

The Cardiff UCU office is normally staffed between 9.30am and 5pm on Monday - Thursdays
Email: ucu@cardiff.ac.uk

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