

Royal College of Art Students' Union

Motion on Palestinian Solidarity and Academic Freedom

SUMMARY

This motion is set to address the urgency to affirm solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for liberation and to urge the RCA to oppose the ongoing genocide against the people of Gaza. This translates to publicly declaring opposition to the unlawful actions of the Israeli government, supporting Palestinian liberation, reviewing complicity in investment funds with companies that facilitate Israel's violations of human rights and divesting from them completely. Throughout the motion, it is stressed that the double-standard that has characterised the stance of the university so far can no longer be and must be addressed immediately, lest the school undergoes significant damage to its reputation and discredits itself by ignoring its own anti-discrimination statements.

This motion is written with immense grief, and urgency, as the loss of Palestinian life has continued to drastically rise since the start of the genocidal campaign in October. We write this motion knowing that for the last 75 years Palestinians have faced Israeli settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, military occupation and apartheid, which has been supported by Western imperialism and has led to the current state-sanctioned, genocidal violence in Palestine.

We know that conflating the legitimate criticism of the Israeli government with anti-Jewish racism undermines the possibility of demonstrating solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for liberation and undermines freedom of speech and academic freedom.

This motion affirms solidarity with Palestinian liberation and supports their struggle against settler colonialism and occupation. To achieve this, the Students' Union (RCASU), supported by the Palestinian Society of the RCA (RCAPalSoc), must challenge and oppose systems of oppression against Palestine and publicly support Palestinian liberation. This includes demonstrated support of the BDS movement and working to hold our University accountable in its complicity in this genocide, including via their investments, and ensuring the University maintains freedom of speech for their students and staff.

THIS SU NOTES:

1 ICJ RULING

- The International Court of Justice has seen to a case put forth by South Africa where the state of Israel is accused of committing acts of genocide against the Palestinian people. On the 26th January 2024, it was effectively ruled that [Israel is plausibly committing genocide](#).

Following the [International Court of Justice's preliminary ruling](#), this motion believes it is in the best interest of the RCA to review its ties with the investments that are directly or indirectly linked with the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people, [in and outside of the occupied Palestinian territories](#). Additionally, it is recommended that the school reaffirms its ethical responsibility by carefully evaluating in what ways it is harming its own reputation and that of its body of students and staff by maintaining a neutral position in this war. We urge the school to consider the ruling of the ICJ and to actively review its public stance. Presently, the school is not acting in accordance with respecting the moral and ethical consequences of this ruling. Therefore, it is crucial that the RCA publicly condemns the actions of the State of Israel and sees to implement a complete divestment from companies that facilitate Israeli human rights violations, the occupation of the Palestinian people and the recorded abuses and illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

A record of the unlawful actions of Israel against the Palestinian people has also constituted the backbone and evidence of the ICJ's ruling. Israel operates as an apartheid state, as affirmed by [nine UN special rapporteurs](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#), Israeli human rights organisations, including [Yesh Din](#) and [B'Tselem](#), and Palestinian human rights organisations, including [Al-Haq](#) and [Addameer](#). This has been reaffirmed by the [Anglican Church of South Africa](#) and the [South African government](#), who have cited their own bitter experience of apartheid as expertise. Given its neutral stance, the Royal College of Arts is seen as an ethical and moral accomplice to the Israeli government, which is in complete dissonance with its own values, its code of conduct and [anti-discrimination statements](#).

2 CONTEXT

- The Palestinian people have been facing settler colonial violence, occupation, and apartheid for 75 years. Israel, with the aid and support of the UK, was formed through the ethnic cleansing of almost one million Palestinians, known as the "Nakba" or catastrophe, with over [700,000 displaced in 1948](#).

- Israel occupied what remained of Palestinian land in 1967, and continues ethnic cleansing and annexation to the present in violation of international law. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur called for "the dismantling of [Israel's] settler-colonial occupation and its apartheid practices" in their [October 2022 Bulletin](#).
- Palestinians have a right to resist Israeli settler colonialism and occupation under international law as [United Nations \(UN\) general assembly resolution 37/43](#) affirms: "the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle."
- Palestinians have the right of return, which has been enshrined through the resolution 194 (III) adopted by the UN general assembly in [1948](#) and reiterated in [1967](#).
- The Israeli government is implementing [collective punishment](#) on the inhabitants of Gaza and this comes in the context of over 75 years of settler colonialism and escalating Israeli violence in Gaza, the West Bank and around the [Al Aqsa mosque](#).
- Thousands of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli state violence in recent years, including 'Operation Cast Lead,' 2008-09 and 'Operation Protective Edge,' 2014. [200 Palestinian people were killed this year prior to October](#), and the number of Palestinians killed in Israeli bombardment surpasses [31,000](#) since then.
- Israel is continuing its genocide of Palestinians in Gaza despite a global mass mobilisation in solidarity with Palestine calling for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the siege on Gaza, and lifting the air, land, and sea blockade.
- Three-quarters of all Britons call for a ceasefire, but Rishi Sunak's Conservative and Keir Starmer's Labour parties back Israel's genocide, settler destruction and ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Moreover, the UK government is weaponising the Israel war on Gaza and the mass mobilisation of people against the genocide of Palestinians to openly declare a racist and Islamophobic national domestic agenda, having a tremendous impact on public spaces and institutions such as universities and schools.
- In addition to providing unconditional economic, political, military and ideological support for Israel, the US and the UK have now become active players in this war by starting a bombing campaign against Yemen rather than stopping the genocide in Gaza.

- On the 27th January 2024, the UK and eight other countries [suspended their funding to the UNRWA](#) after [unverified allegations made by Israel](#), worsening the humanitarian aid in the Gaza strip and [allowing famine and the death of the most vulnerable](#) in need of healthcare.
- On the 26th October 2023, 5 months ago, [120 countries](#), constituting more than two-thirds of the United Nations General Assembly, called for a humanitarian truce in Gaza, yet the United Kingdom declined to do so.
- On 5th of March 2024, the [US vetoed a ceasefire](#). To date, three draft council resolutions for an immediate ceasefire have been vetoed by the US.
- Many reports have been published stating that the Israeli government is committing crimes against humanity in Gaza, including collective punishment, ethnic cleansing and unfolding genocide. This includes [multiple UN special rapporteurs](#), [Palestinian human rights organisations](#), [Jewish civil society groups](#), and [hundreds of Holocaust and genocide studies scholars](#). The International Criminal Court has been formally asked to [investigate the unfolding genocide](#) in Gaza.
- Israeli settlements are built on stolen Palestinian land. They are illegal land grabs that form an integral part of Israel's occupation infrastructure pushing indigenous Palestinian families off their land, robbing Palestinians of natural resources and denying Palestinians their right of movement. [UN Security Council Resolution 2334 \(2016\)](#) reconfirmed the illegality of Israeli settlements, denouncing them as “flagrant violations” of international law. Israeli settlements are considered war crimes under international law.

3 INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Currently, neither RCA nor its Students' Union has released a statement condemning the actions of Israel and calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.
- The RCA has a moral and political responsibility to speak out against injustice, [apartheid](#) and genocide.
- The RCA has chosen to remain silent on the complete annihilation of academic infrastructure, [a devastating educate and deliberate targeting of Palestinian scholars by the Israeli army](#). The large-scale destruction of educational institutions, [libraries](#), nursery schools, but also [cultural institutions such as museums, cultural centres, archeological sites, and religious buildings](#) such as mosques and churches is not only an uricide but also epistemicide and memoricide (see annex). The silence of

the RCA can only be interpreted as selective solidarity and a result of cowardly double standards.

- The RCA has adopted intimidation tactics in response to student and staff-led events held in solidarity with Palestine. Universities and Students' Unions have a duty to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom, including expressions of support for Palestine. Students have the right to protest on campus, and this right should be protected, yet [students and faculty are under scrutiny, surveillance and are targeted by the government](#), universities, and the media for expressing solidarity with Palestinians. Targeting of students, societies and academic individuals and organisations who speak up against genocide is part of a full-frontal attack by the UK government on personal and academic freedoms.
- Israel is committing crimes against humanity including:
 - The deliberate bombing of civilian homes, universities, schools and hospitals;
 - The blockade of water, food, medical supplies and fuel;
 - The proposal by Israel's Ministry of Intelligence for the forced expulsion of more than two million human beings into the Egyptian desert.
- The attempt to conflate anti-Zionism and legitimate criticism of the Israeli state with antisemitism must be resisted, as this does disservice to the antiracist movement, which includes fighting against anti-Jewish racism, and undermines academic freedom and freedom of speech.

The motion believes that the RCA's stance and actions do not reflect the RCA's commitment to become an anti-racist institution, and it runs counter to its various statements to achieve a respectful work and study environment, such as [the Equality statement, the RCA general statement on anti-discrimination, the RCA statement on antisemitism, and the Equality Act 2010](#). The RCA's contradictory governance and selective solidarity will in the long term damage the reputation of the college itself and therefore all staff and students.

THIS SU MOTION RESOLVES:

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- To declare its solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people against occupation, to call for an immediate ceasefire and an immediate end to the genocidal violence in Gaza, and to call on its members to support Palestinian liberation for the end of the Israeli occupation.
- To show and lead by example by declaring solidarity with people who resist systems of oppression. The RCA has demonstrated [an exemplary stance in its condemnation](#)

[of the invasion of Ukraine](#) and the destruction of its universities and academic infrastructure. We call on the RCA to condemn the Israeli genocidal warfare and show the same solidarity and support to the Palestinian people and the sovereignty of Palestine.

- To emulate the examples of other international and UK universities in their stances in active support of vulnerable and oppressed people:
 - In 2011, [the University of Johannesburg](#) ended its ties with Israel Ben Gurion University.
 - In June 2021, [Royal College of Art's School of Architecture](#) committed to supporting calls for BDS and refuses to engage with 'entities that enact or implement Israel's apartheid policies'
 - In September 2022, the Vice Chancellor of the [University of Sussex](#), Professor Roseneil, referred to Sussex's history of solidarity with Black South Africans and spoke out against censorship in the weeks after Salman Rushdie was violently attacked, citing these as "the penchant for cultural challenge for which Sussex had become known".
 - In 1989, the University of Sussex [raised £3000](#) for the Nelson and Winnie Mandela Scholarship Fund to support Black South Africans during South African apartheid.
 - In January 2020, the [Brown University's Advisory Committee on Corporate Responsibility in Investment Policies \(ACCRIP\)](#) recommended the divestment from Companies that Facilitate the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territory. This proposal precedes [Brown's student divestment proposal](#) of February 2024.
 - On the 22nd February 2024, [the University of California Davis](#) passed a bill that divests funds from companies complicit with the actions of the Israeli government, in accordance with BDS guidelines.
 - Three Norwegian universities are boycotting complicit Israeli universities: [OsloMet](#) suspended its ties, [the University of South Eastern Norway](#) and the [University of Bergen](#) ended their relation with complicit Israeli universities.

This motion believes that with the dismantling of misinformation and epistemicide conducted by Israel and its unconditional allies, many education and cultural institutions will follow in the divestment and boycotting of Israeli apartheid warfare apparatus, its institutions and its economy. This motion also believes that the RCA should end any ties to Israeli universities and companies, in and outside of occupied Palestinian territories, [as the Israeli apartheid regime targets Palestinians in and outside of their occupied territories](#).

- To call upon the VC and University to uphold the institutional principles of courage and integrity to oppose systems of oppression against Palestine and protect student and staff freedom of speech in light of state intervention. Including:
 - To reject threats by the UK government to revoke the immigration status of foreign nationals who express support for Palestine and to protect students and staff from attacks on their freedom of speech.
 - Develop anti-racism policies that address the shared logic of dehumanisation that underlies all forms of racism.
 - Raise [scholarship](#) and hardship funds for Palestinian students so as to provide critical financial and wellbeing support to students in their darkest hour. Specifically, Palestine must be added as a “priority territory” under The Deputy Vice Chancellor’s International Scholarship.
- To reaffirm and call for the UK government to recognise the right of Palestinians to freedom, self-determination and return, and the sovereignty of the Palestinian state.
- To support efforts to [hold political leaders accountable](#) for aiding and abetting war crimes in Gaza.
- To submit this motion to the National Union of Students and call on it to publicly support the Palestinian struggle and oppose British imperialism’s role in the oppression of the Palestinian people.
- To declare its solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people against occupation, to call for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the genocidal violence in Gaza, and to call on its members to support Palestinian liberation.

INSTITUTIONAL DIVESTMENT & BDS

- To adopt policies conforming to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.
 - We believe that global boycotts are a non-violent, legitimate, and effective tactic that assisted in the successful struggle against apartheid in South Africa.
- To boycott [Prevent](#).
 - Prevent undermines freedom of expression and has been shown to disproportionately impact Muslims, something that has been accentuated in the context of Palestinian Solidarity.
- Provide full transparency of all current and future financial investments to demonstrate compliance with RCA’s responsible investment policy. In line with [previous commitments to divest from fossil fuel](#) and maintain an [ethical investment](#)

[portfolio](#), we demand an equal commitment to the policy/guidelines outlined in the BDS movement.

- To commit that RCA [will not use HSBC services while the bank continues to be complicit in Israel's violations of Palestinian rights](#), and to move any services we currently use HSBC for to another, non-complicit bank.
 - To write to HSBC expressing this commitment, and encouraging them to end their investments, loans, and financial ties with Israeli settler colonialism and apartheid.
 - HSBC bank invests and provides services worth millions to companies that supply Israel with equipment – including BAE Systems and Raytheon, whose weapons components were used in the attacks in 2014, and Caterpillar, in which HSBC held £99.5 million of shares in 2017. Caterpillar sells its bulldozers to the Israeli military knowing they are used to demolish Palestinian homes, factories, agricultural land, and water pipes. It provides equipment used to reinforce the illegal Apartheid Wall, and to build illegal settlements on Palestinian land.
 - Audit all [Hewlett Packard Company \(HP\)](#) equipment and technical services and cancel any outstanding orders.
- Campaign for the right to boycott and resist the [Economic Activity of Public Bodies \(Overseas Matters\) Bill](#).
 - To condemn the British government's unquestioning support for the Israeli state and the distortions of the mainstream media in Britain in its coverage of this conflict
 - To divest from companies that have a hand in the current genocide and to adhere to the Palestinian Trade Unions call to [halt the arms trade to Israel](#) and to end crimes against humanity.
 - To align with RCA's commitment to achieving the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), as outlined in its [Responsible Investment Policy](#), by committing to end the genocide and ecocide in Gaza, which has resulted in the collapse of drinking water supplies, exacerbated the spread of diseases, devastated what little agriculture is left in Gaza, and generated more CO2 emissions in the first two months of the genocide than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world's most climate vulnerable nations. 99% of those emissions were attributed to Israel's aerial bombardment and ground invasion, and half of the total CO2 emissions were due to US carriage planes flying military supplies to Israel.
 - The Responsible Investment Policy states: "Sustainability is a key priority for the RCA and the College embraces its unique role in contributing to achieving the UN's SDGs. The goals provide "a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future." The RCA

recognises that “ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

- To support and provide legal protection to students at the RCA willing to educate themselves and their peers on the Palestinian liberation struggle, to discuss openly on campus the Palestinian cause, and to address and criticise the racist apartheid Israeli regime.
 - The RCA website states: "It is not antisemitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent. It is not antisemitic to hold the Israeli Government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government's policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest antisemitic intent."
- To support and provide legal protection to students at the RCA in their efforts to campaign and demonstrate for the liberation of the Palestinian people and against their oppression.
- To end the suppression of staff and students in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, and to protect the right to academic freedom.

IHRA DEFINITION & ANTISEMITISM

- We take an uncompromising position against all forms of racism, including Islamophobia and antisemitism.
- The RCA must actively adopt measures, determined in collaboration with RCASU and UCU, that counter the increased anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Muslim, antisemitic, and anti-Arab attacks in the UK and internationally.
- We refuse the IHRA definition of Antisemitism and call for the University to acknowledge that a critique of the state of Israel should not be conflated with anti-Jewish racism, and to revoke the IHRA definition of antisemitism from the [RCA anti-discrimination statements - RCA statement on antisemitism](#).
 - The IHRA definition inhibits our rights and freedom as students to stand for Palestinian liberation and criticise the Israel apartheid regime.
 - The IHRA definition does not practically address how antisemitism looks, nor its root causes, and therefore does not make Jewish people safer. Instead, it can easily be used as a censorship tool and a way to delegitimise and silence Palestinian rights advocates. We stand in solidarity with members of

the RCAUCU in their position from their [2021 Open Letter to the Vice Chancellor](#).

- A report by BRISMES and ELSC of [The Adverse Impact of the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism](#) has shown that it actively conflates legitimate criticism of the state of Israel and its policies with anti-Jewish racism.

- RCA must condemn the colonisation of Palestine being used to insight Islamophobia and antisemitism and to support students who face discrimination, such as cancellations and silencing. This includes making sure students are able to show their work, especially when criticising Israel or showing solidarity with Palestine.

ANNEX

[\(Annex 5 of the Middle East Studies Association \(MESA Board AZ, US\) Joint Statement with CAF regarding the ongoing genocidal violence against the Palestinian people and their cultural heritage in Gaza\)](#)

This annex represents a compilation as of 1 March 2024 of available documentation concerning Palestinian archives, cultural heritage, libraries, and museums destroyed during the ongoing attack on Gaza by the Israeli military. The destruction is catalogued by category of heritage: libraries, archives, and publishing houses; cultural and social centers; media and artistic production companies; museums; churches; mosques; archaeological sites; cemeteries and monuments; traditional houses and markets; and natural heritage.

Public Libraries and Archives

Gaza Municipal Library
Central Archives of Gaza City
Palace of Justice
Rashad al-Shawa Cultural Center
Diana Tamari Sabbagh Library

University Libraries

Islamic University of Gaza Library, Gaza City
Al-Israa University Library and National Museum
Al-Quds Open University Library, Gaza City
Jawaharlal Nehru Library, Al-Azhar University, Gaza City

Publishing Houses and Smaller Libraries

Al-Shorouq Al-Daem Library and Exhibition
Sami Mansour Bookshop and Library in Gaza City
Enaim Library
Al-Nahda Library
Lubbud Library
Al-Nur Cultural Center's library

Cultural and Social Centers

Arab Orthodox Cultural and Social Center
Dar Al-Shabab Cultural and Development Authority
The General Union of Cultural Centers
The Sununu Foundation for Arts and Culture
Our Children Society for Development

Gaza Center for Culture and Arts
The Hakawi Association for Culture and Arts
The Palestinian Association for Development and Heritage Protection
Shababik Professionals
Village of Arts and Crafts, Gaza Municipality
Widad Theater and Widad Association for Community Development
Rafida Suhail Artist Studio
Es'ad Child Cultural Center
Bayader Theatre and Arts Association
Iltiqat Gallery for Contemporary Visual Arts
Kana'an Educational Development Institute
Ataa Library, International Board on Books for Young People Children in Crisis Library (Beit Hanoun)
Yasser Arafat Foundation

Media and artistic production companies

Mashariq Company
Asayel Studios
Mix and Match Studio

Museums

Rafah Museum
Al Qarara Cultural Museum (also known as the Khan Younis Museum)
Qasr al-Basha (Pasha's Palace Museum, also known as Radwan castle)
Mathaf al-Funduq (Museum Hotel)
Al-'Aqqad Cultural Center of Heritage Archaeology and Museum
Shahwan Museum
Khudari Museum
Ibrahim Abu Sha'ar Heritage Diwan
Deir al-Balah museum
Cultural Karameh Museum

Churches

The Church of Saint Porphyrius
Ruins of the Monastery of St. Hilarion, part of the Tell Umm Amer site in Nuseirat
Byzantine Church located in the Jabaliya refugee camp
Holy Family Church

Mosques and other Muslim religious sites

At least 114 mosques have been destroyed and 200 others have been damaged in Gaza

The Grand Omari Mosque
Othman Bin Qashqar Mosque

Mosque of Sayyid Hashim
Sheikh Abdullah Mosque
Katib al-Wilayah Mosque
Al-Zafar Dmari Mosque and Center for Manuscripts and Ancient Documents (Shuja'iyya)
Sheikh Shaaban Mosque
Mosque of Ibn Othman, Gaza City
Maqam Khalil Al-Rahman (Abasan)
Maqam Al-Khidr (Deir al-Balah)
Maqam al-Nabi Yusuf (Bani Suheila)

Archaeological sites

Tell al-Ajjul
Tel al-Mansatar (Gaza)
Tal al-Sakan (Al-Zahra)
Tell 86 (al-Qarara)
Tell Rafah (also known as Tell Zara'b)
Anthedon Harbor
Roman necropolis ([Ard-al-Moharbeen](#)) in northern Gaza
Qal'at Burquq

Cemeteries and Monuments

At least 16 cemeteries desecrated during the ground offensive in Gaza

English Cemetery (Gaza)
English Cemetery (Zuwaidah)
Unknown Soldier Monument

Historic or traditional houses and markets

Old City of Gaza City
Al-Suqqa House (Shuja'iyya)
Tirzi House (Rimal)
Hammam al-Sammara (the Sammara Bath)
Al-Fawakhir district
Al-Zawiya market, historical extension of the Al-Qaysariyya market, also destroyed.
Mazan Market (East Khan Younis)

Natural Heritage

Coastal Wetlands in the Gaza Valley