



Association of University Heads, Israel

11 October 2023
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To our colleagues, heads of universities around the world,

These are difficult times. We thank you for the support and concern we have already received from so many of you.

As you are aware, early last Saturday morning, Hamas carried out an unusually brutal and violent attack primarily against civilians, within Israel. While the leadership of some academic institutions has issued public condemnations, we learned that in others this has been regarded as just "one more event" in the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, which can be understood from multiple perspectives.

We would like to emphasize that this is far from the truth. This was an act of singular barbaric violence which must be thoroughly renounced. To show why this is so, we will need to share some truly disturbing details, as referred to in President Biden's speech and now coming to light in the international press. We know that these will disturb you no less than they have shaken us.

On the Sabbath and Sukkoth holiday and 50 years almost to the day after the fateful Yom Kippur War, Hamas unleashed a surprise rocket attack on Israel from Gaza, reaching as far north as the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem areas, while simultaneously Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants breached the border and brutally massacred those in the communities just across the border inside Israel – women, elderly, children, young families. Kids attending a music festival, peace activists, elderly people in their 80's, toddlers. Hundreds. Many were slaughtered on the spot, others huddled in their homes for hours before being found and killed or were held hostage in their homes or communities under constant threat of death, while still others were taken captive and brought into Gaza. Horrific videos posted by Hamas from Gaza show the parading of injured hostages in the street to great cheering, show cruelty to children, taunting of the elderly, show rape and torture.

All this as hundreds of Israelis were injured or killed by indiscriminate rocket fire, which has hit both Jewish towns and Bedouin and Arab villages. Just two days ago, a mosque in the village of Abu Ghosh was hit by rocket fire.

Let's be clear. This is not "war as usual" or just another chapter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are not "good people on both sides". Hamas and Islamic Jihad have proven themselves to be cruel, barbaric organizations reminiscent of the Taliban and the Islamic State.



אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev





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We have heard of initiatives undertaken by faculty and students on some campuses in countries outside of Israel to support Hamas and Islamic Jihad actions, and we understand that there has not always been a clear response from academic leadership to such signs of support. We hope that you will agree with us that there can be no support for such terror organizations in Western democratic societies, just like there is no support for Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. There can be no support for purposeful massacres of civilian populations, or for the taking civilian hostages.

As the guardians of higher education and academia, actively pursuing knowledge for the benefit of humanity, as role models for and teachers of the leadership of tomorrow, we all share the responsibility to educate our communities.

What values are we passing on? Freedom of speech and academic freedom, absolutely. But a stand against barbaric violence perpetrated on civilian populations? We know you join us in renouncing such acts of violence.

Yours,

Prof. Arie Zaban, President, Bar-Ilan University; Chairperson - Association of University Heads – VERA

Prof. Daniel A. Chamovitz, President, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Prof. Alon Chen, President, Weizmann Institute of Science

Prof. Asher Cohen, President, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Prof. Leo Corry, President, the Open University of Israel

Prof. Ehud Grossman, President, Ariel University

Prof. Ariel Porat, President, Tel-Aviv University

Prof. Ron Robin, President, University of Haifa

Prof. Uri Sivan, President, the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology

