

Professor Koen Lamberts  
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University of Sheffield  
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29 November 2024

Dear Professor Koen Lamberts,

We write to you as Director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and Director of the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) to express our deep concerns at the actions taken by the University of Sheffield which have resulted in the repression of discussions about Palestine on campus.

We understand that the Sheffield University and College Union had planned to host an internal teach-in for university students on 1 October titled “What Is Happening in Gaza?”, which was to be delivered by university staff with research expertise and teaching remits in this area.

We are disturbed that University of Sheffield Security Services intervened to prevent the event from taking place, on the basis that the organisers had failed to provide a risk assessment required under “events safety guidance” for events organised by staff that do “not fall within the normal work duties or study activities”. We understand that despite the room booking request having been made on 18 September, in no prior correspondence had this risk assessment been requested by the university.

Further to this, the national “Campus Voices for Palestine” tour, supported by the University College Union (UCU) and the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP), had been scheduled to be hosted at the University of Sheffield on 5 November. We are astonished that the tour was forced to relocate to Sheffield Hallam University due to the disproportionate restrictions imposed by University Security, who also consistently described the event as “controversial” in correspondence with organisers. This labelling reflects a racist and discriminatory trope commonly used to delegitimise the Palestinian struggle for justice and freedom, and contests the existence of core Palestinian rights, which are enshrined in international law.

The tour itself was an initiative bringing Palestinian academics to British campuses to discuss the importance of international solidarity, and how Palestinian higher education institutions are resisting erasure when Israel’s systematic destruction of the Palestinian education

system has obliterated all universities in the Gaza Strip and more than 80% of its schools in what UN experts have termed “scholasticide”.<sup>1</sup>

At a time when Israel’s escalating and brutal military assault against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip has so far killed over 44,000 men, women, and children – in what the International Court of Justice has ruled as to be plausible case of genocide<sup>2</sup> – the university has acted to silence Palestinian voices, and the free discussion of the historical and contemporary reality of life in Palestine.

The actions taken by the university send a worrying message to students and staff that they will be unfairly targeted for speaking up for universal principles of human rights and international law. Not only do these actions exhibit a failure of the university to uphold academic freedom, but we would also like to remind you that singling out Palestinians, and those who stand in solidarity with them, and excluding them from public spaces is a form of discrimination prohibited by law.

As the largest Palestine solidarity organisation in Europe, PSC has more than 300,000 subscribers and affiliates, which includes 16 National Trade Unions, including UCU. The ELSC provides legal support to defend the solidarity movement against restrictions that undermine the public’s fundamental rights of freedom of expression, holding repressive entities and institutions accountable for anti-Palestinian racism, having provided legal assistance in over 600 cases in 7 different jurisdictions. Together, we represent the many people in Britain who are concerned to defend Palestinian rights.

As a matter of urgency, we would like to know what steps the university is taking to rectify the immediate harm caused by the cancellation of both events to Palestinian staff and students, and those standing in solidarity with them. We would also like to know what steps the university is taking to prevent any similar discriminatory incident from reoccurring in the future.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Jamal, Director, Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Giovanni Fassina, European Legal Support Centre

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/26/israel-not-complying-world-court-order-genocide-case>