

Subject: Request for an update on the University of Sheffield's duty of care to students and alumni from Gaza and commitment to the right to education for Palestinian students

Dear Professor Koen Lamberts (President and Vice-Chancellor), Andrew Winter (Director of Student Support Services & Associate Director of S&AS), Rob Sykes (Chief Operating Officer) and Daryl Ormerod (Chief Executive, Students' Union),

As former students of the University of Sheffield, and as both former and current Student Union Sabbatical Officers we are proud of the vital and impactful initiatives taken by the University in partnership with students in recent years to demonstrate our commitment to supporting the right to education internationally, particularly in Gaza.

However, we write to you with profound concern and dismay regarding the absence of a public statement or evident action by the University of Sheffield concerning the wellbeing of students and our fellow alumni impacted currently by the ongoing war on Gaza, specifically regarding the ten individuals who are the recipients of the Gaza Scholarship.

The current Israeli attack on Gaza, which at the time of writing has resulted in the killing of over 26,000 Palestinians and injured more than 63,000, has seen schools, colleges and universities indiscriminately destroyed in addition to other vital civilian infrastructure including homes and medical facilities. According to the Geneva-based independent Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Israel has systematically destroyed every university in Gaza in stages since 7 October 2023.

One of the most important actions that the University has taken in recent years demonstrating a serious commitment to the right of education internationally was the decision to offer an annual scholarship to students from Gaza since 2013.

We are writing to enquire upon both the welfare of the ten students from Gaza that have received scholarships over the past 10 years at the University of Sheffield, and on the status of the scholarship programme itself moving forward.

The current war in Gaza is having a devastating impact. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on 26 January 2024 that South Africa's case accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza was plausible.

We are therefore profoundly concerned about the welfare of current students and our fellow alumni and their families from Gaza. The University has unfortunately been silent on this issue. Given the on-going war on Gaza, many of our fellow alumni may be facing dire circumstances, including displacement, health-related problems, bereavement and threats to their life.

We are extremely disappointed that the University has not made any public statements about the situation facing the University's alumni from Gaza, on the future support that the University will be offering to students from Gaza, or about the broader attack on education that we have all witnessed over the past several months on our screens.

We believe that it is imperative that the University addresses the following concerns:

1. Duty of Care to Alumni: We are particularly troubled by what appears to be a lapse in the University's duty of care towards our alumni. We request the University to provide confirmation that they have actively reached out to each alumnus from the University's Gaza scholarship programme, especially considering the current war situation.

2. Support for Alumni in the UK and Palestinian students currently studying at the University of Sheffield: For those currently in the UK, we urge the University to extend comprehensive support, particularly with immigration matters. This includes advocating for and assisting with family reunification visas, enabling their families to join them in the UK under these distressing circumstances.

3. Alumni Outside the UK: For alumni not residing in the UK, it is crucial that the University establishes and maintains communication, ensuring they are safe and supported as needed.

4. Prospective Scholars from Gaza, and current Students stuck in Gaza: For these students, we ask the University to provide full support in terms of immigration assistance, covering the full costs of necessary procedures, especially for those who may have lost crucial documents like biometric IDs in the conflict. This includes any unexpected costs that may arise due to the current humanitarian and political situation in the region.

We would request that the University publicise any actions it takes to stay connected with our Palestinian Alumni who have been awarded the Gaza scholarship. We also request an update on the future status of the Gaza scholarship programme.

Now more than ever it is vital to uphold and support the right to education for Palestinians who are living through an avoidable humanitarian catastrophe. The University's Gaza scholarship programme has been an important contribution to supporting Palestinians' education over the past ten years and is an initiative which reflects the internationalist spirit and values of both the students and staff of this University.

We look forward to your response addressing these concerns and on the concrete steps you'll be taking to support our fellow alumni, current and prospective students during these tumultuous times.

Yours faithfully,

Abdi Suleiman, President, 2012-13
Alice Patterson, Postgraduate Students' Officer, 2022-23
Alison Romaine, Education Officer, 2022-23
Amy Masson, Women's Officer, 2012-13
Beren Maddison, Welfare Officer, 2019-20
Brittany Bowles, Sports Officer, 2019-20
Charlie Porter, Education Officer, 2019-20
Christy McMorrow, President, 2015-16
Evie Croxford, President, 2021-22
Fadi Dakkak, International Students' Officer, 2012-13
Fiona Edwards, Women's Officer, 2008-09
Freya Vanevery, Mature Students Officer, 2022-23
Harry Carling, SU Development Officer, 2019-20
Iwan James, Well-being and Sports Officer, 2022-23
Jephthah Ekogiawe, LGBTQ+ Officer, 2023-24
Joe Oliver, Education Officer, 2010-11
Jordan Weir, Development Officer, 2020-2021
Liam Hand, President, 2022-23
Lily Byrne, President, 2023-24
María Jose Lourido Moreno, Education Officer, 2023-24
Martha Evans, Activities Officer, 2019-20
Minesh Parekh, Education Officer, 2015-16
Rosa Tully, Women's Officer, 2019-20
Sara Moon, SU Development Officer, 2012-13
Shona Tulloch, Liberation Officer, 2021-22/Disabled Students Officer, 2022-23
Tomás Rocha Lawrence, Liberation Officer, 2023-24
Yael Shafritz, President, 2014-15

