

LAWYERS ARE RESPONSIBLE

Lawyers are Responsible statement on student occupations against the war on Gaza

10 May 2024

Lawyers are Responsible is a group that works to tackle the legal profession's role in enabling the fossil fuel industry. We have signed a declaration of conscience that emphasises our support for peaceful protest - a right which is increasingly being undermined and eroded in Britain. This includes the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association that can only be interfered with where there is a legitimate aim and in a way which is both necessary and proportionate to that aim. We stand in solidarity with the students of British universities currently exercising their democratic rights to protest the war and '[apocalyptic conditions](#)' in Gaza. We also support their demands for their universities to divest and disassociate from institutions profiting off or engaging in Israel's acts of occupation, apartheid and human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ("OPT"). We believe doing so is essential to climate and ecological justice.

Israel's actions undermine climate justice

Israel's use of force in Gaza is exercised through violence and dispossession but also through extensive ecological damage. The systematic decimation of entire Palestinian villages and towns by bulldozers and explosives has had a devastating impact on the environment and its residents. Toxins from the destruction of buildings and infrastructure is polluting the air and ground. Almost half the land in Gaza is in agricultural production which until October was a thriving part of Palestine's high quality olive industry amongst other produce. Constant air strikes in Gaza have destroyed around one third of agricultural crops and poisoned the land and soil. Land is inaccessible for cultivation due to forced removals to the south and warfare. Aside from the extreme conditions Palestinians are enduring in Gaza, ruin of farmers' fertile land will in the longer term force thousands of Palestinians into destitution.

More broadly, Israel has long controlled the [Palestinian water supply in the OPT](#), and water has routinely been used to coerce and control Palestinian residents. It is reported that Israel routinely dumps [waste and raw sewage in the West Bank](#), resulting in poisoned water supplies for Palestinian residents. More recently the UN has warned Israel to stop using [water as a weapon of war](#) against Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel also controls waste management in the OPT, which limits Palestinians' ability to manage and treat waste effectively, resulting in pollution which harms human and animal health.

It is important to take an intersectional approach to tackling climate and ecological breakdown. Israeli occupation and war is exacerbating the climate crisis in the region by constraining Palestinians' ability to access and manage their natural resources sustainably, and preventing their ability to govern effectively. Climate justice demands not only action to mitigate and adapt to the climate and ecological crisis, but also for the fundamental restructuring of power systems that perpetuate the crisis. Issues of social equality, distributive justice, and control of resources need to be addressed.

British student protests

Universities should be places of free thought, where students can organise to help create the conditions for a better world. We are concerned that the British student encampments are being portrayed as potential threats to campuses rather than peaceful protests to legitimately demand action against the war by universities. The protests acknowledge the multiple international, [legal and academic actors](#) who have identified that the actions of the Israeli Government in Gaza since October 2023 amount to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, [including an International Court of Justice](#) ruling in January that there is a plausible risk that these actions amount to genocide. The [UN Security Council](#) passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire in March; [Turkey has stopped trade with Israel](#) and [President Biden](#) has stated that the US will cease to supply bombs to Israel if the operation into Rafah progresses. These Students align with experts, international figures and countries that are calling for and taking meaningful action to prevent further death and destruction in Gaza. We urge universities not to seek to criminalise students exercising their democratic right to protest, but rather to support their students and engage with their demands to help bring about a ceasefire and the urgent provision of aid and fuel. These students are acting as the conscience of our universities and the world.

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