

Berlin, 02.08.2024

To the Presidium of the Technische Universität Berlin (TUB),

We, a collective of students and employees at the TU Berlin, have been witnessing a clear lack of empathy and support from the side of the University towards the Palestinian community and those supporting them. While the university swiftly issued a statement in support of Israel in October, it has yet to address the 76 years of violations of international law and human rights in Palestine, especially in regard to Palestinian academics and universities. This silence is deeply concerning to us.

Furthermore, the university has provided consultation hours for Jewish students affected by antisemitism, a commendable initiative reflecting a commitment to a safe campus for all. However, similar support has not been extended to Arab, Muslim, or pro-Palestinian students, despite a [documented rise in anti-Muslim incidents in Germany \(Reuters\)](#).

Pro-Palestinian TU students have also faced violence during peaceful demonstrations calling for a ceasefire and an end to the occupation, with several needing hospitalization. Additionally, new laws are being introduced that undermine our voices and our ability to freely express ourselves on campus and engage in political activities.

In light of these concerns, we present the following demands to ensure the university supports all its members equally and upholds the principles of academic freedom, human rights, and solidarity.

Public Statement of Support:

It is stated in the TU Berlin's [official website](#) that the "*TU Berlin has a special tradition of supporting scientists and prospective academics who have had to give up their livelihoods and leave their home countries due to wars and political persecution. This is not only a self-evident duty for historical reasons; rather, with the initiative Scholars At Risk, it clearly takes a stand on the international situation.*"

As a member of the Scholars At Risk Network (SAR) we find it concerning that the TU Berlin has not yet shared the SAR's [Call to Action](#), in which it states "*that as of November at least 439 members of the Palestinian higher education community have been [killed](#), and Israeli strikes have [damaged](#) buildings belonging to five of Gaza's six universities.*" and that "*On Israeli university campuses, scholars have been [pressured to resign](#) for expression critical of the Israeli government's actions, while [Palestinian students](#) have been [suspended](#) for their social media posts and [threatened](#) with violence". We also find the fact that the TU Berlin is not even applying what the SAR is calling for concerning considering it was shared 8 months ago in December 2023. This showcases TU Berlin's administration's lack of commitment to the values of SAR, and to its own.[\[SAR\]](#)*

1. Affirmation of SAR Membership and Principles:

Publicly reaffirm TUB's commitment to the principles of the Scholar At Risk network.

2. Sharing and applying SAR's Call to Action:

Share and actively apply the Scholar At Risk's call to action, this includes:

- Refraining from wrongful suspensions, terminations, or sanctions against campus associations or individuals for nonviolent expressive or academic activities.
- Condemning **all** forms of hate speech, **while resisting policies that conflate legitimate criticism of Zionist political ideology or Israeli government policies with antisemitism.**
- **Resisting external pressures from government officials, donors, alumni, or other actors demanding restrictions on nonviolent expressive or academic activities.**
- Reasserting academic freedom by hosting and facilitating dialogues, teach-ins, and events to deepen understanding of sensitive issues. (see demands 5. and 6.)
- Developing proactive, values-based approaches to handle incidents, ensuring respect for academic freedom, institutional autonomy, accountability, equitable access, and social responsibility.

3. Public Statement of Support:

Issue a public statement condemning the bombing of Palestinian universities and advocating for the protection of academic freedom in both Palestinian and Israeli institutions, and echoing the Scholars At Risk Network's call to ***"Refrain from direct, complicit, or indirect involvement in attacks on higher education communities, including by implementing a mutual, meaningful, and lasting cessation of hostilities"*** and to ***"Refrain from arbitrary detentions and arrests of students and scholars, and release those who have been wrongfully imprisoned and detained"***[[SAR](#)].

Collaboration with Palestinian Universities:

Given the current situation in the Palestinian territories, many Palestinians are unable to continue their studies locally due to the destruction of universities and war conditions, nor can they return after fleeing. Thus, they require assistance in Germany and should be supported by universities, just as Ukrainian refugees were supported⁽¹⁾.

4. To enable students and prospective students fleeing the war and illegal occupation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank to re-enter or continue their studies as quickly as possible and to support them on this path, the following proposals are demanded:

- Establish a relief fund for Palestinian refugees.
- Ensure the same financial support as in the case of Ukrainian refugees: scholarships for students and researchers, possible reimbursement of study-related costs, and financial support in urgent cases related to studies.
- Provide all student resources, language courses, and mentoring programs, as well as lectures for prospective students from Palestine, including those whose legal status does not meet the official requirements for starting or continuing studies.
- Develop digital teaching offerings and entry courses, possibly in cooperation with Palestinian universities (e.g., in the West Bank), similar to "Ukraine Digital."
- Expand (or submit a proposal to DAAD) the Bridge IT program to include academics fleeing from the Gaza Strip and West Bank.
- Establish an additional mentoring program for counseling and support options for Palestinian students.
- Establishment of cooperation and partnership with Palestinian universities to enable mutual knowledge exchange and collaboration in the scientific and research fields, as well as to build long-term relationships.

Addressing Bias in Combatting Racism

5. Introduce an Anti-Racism Office and actively establish anti-racist structures

Given the recent increase in various forms of discrimination, notably anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian racism⁽²⁾, in Germany⁽³⁾ and within the German universities⁽⁴⁾, it is imperative to recognize the danger of the current situation. Establishing a framework to support, include and provide safe spaces for all those affected by all kinds of discrimination, not exclusively antisemitism, while also raising awareness among students and staff at TU Berlin, is crucial.

- As highlighted in a [TU statement](#), institutional racist discrimination and marginalization must be combated by establishing '*empowerment spaces and services*' for those affected, as well as creating '*de-colonial and anti-racist knowledge production*'. We demand the application of that in form of an obligatory recurring Ersti-Lecture on the topic of de-colonial and anti-racist knowledge production, including the role of universities as well as TU and its history in particular regarding that matter.

- We consider it obligatory to protect all students at TU Berlin equally, regardless of their skin colour, religion, ethnic background, etc. Just as anti-Semitism contact points have been established for our fellow Jewish students, we demand the opening of an anti-discrimination office to support victims of all forms of discrimination, including anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian and anti-Black discrimination, to provide help for students in need and to raise awareness among students and staff. Additionally, there should be at least one expert on each form of discrimination in order assure the inclusion of all students.
- Discriminatory instances shall not be declared as isolated incidents, instead the university should openly recognise their structural origins and actively address and act against them. Furthermore, it is essential to consider anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism as distinct categories⁽²⁾, separate but equally important as antisemitism, in regard to the current political climate.
- We demand of the TU to implement a sustainable structure for investigating discrimination at TU, including recurring reports each semester that shall be openly accessible through the TU website. Additionally, the topic of self-censorship regarding Palestine should be examined further, e.g. as done in a survey by M. Lynch and S. Telhami "Scholars who study the Middle East are afraid to speak out" ([survey](#)), and as reported by Scholar At Risk⁽⁵⁾.

6. Host a Panel Discussion on the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism:

- Organize a public panel discussion with experts from Berlin universities to scientifically examine the IHRA definition and its implications in comparison to The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. This discourse should be conducted openly, with the presence of at least one Palestine expert, to foster understanding and academic freedom.

University Autonomy and Student Protection

7. Develop a De-escalation Protocol with the Not In Our Name TU Student Collective:

- Due to recent increasing police presence, violence and repression in Berlin campuses, the TU administration should collaborate with the Not In Our Name TU Student Collective to create a de-escalation protocol to ensure safety for all students. This protocol should prioritize preventing police involvement (due to recent events in other campuses and in Berlin), including provisions for legal support in cases of arrests or police violence.

8. Provide a Permanent Space for the Not In Our Name TU Student Collective:

- Allocate a permanent room accessible exclusively to the Not In Our Name TU Student Collective for their activities without exposing individual personal information in order to protect pro-Palestinian voices against the ongoing repression in Germany. Additionally, grant access to a seminar room or lecture hall for organizing informational events and hosting guest speakers.

We believe these steps are essential for the TUB to demonstrate its commitment to academic freedom, human rights, and solidarity with at-risk scholars and students. We look forward to your positive response and prompt action on these matters.

Appendix

(1) Support of Ukrainian students and demand of support for Palestinian students:

In 2022, TU Berlin established a donation-based relief fund to support Ukrainian scholars and students, providing bridge funding and "other support services." The fund raised a total of €90,000 and provided the following support:

- Scholarships for researchers and students, including reimbursement of all purpose-specific costs associated with studies, such as university applications through Uni-assist.
- Enabling re-entry into studies accompanied by mentoring/subject mentorship programs, including consulting services and language courses.
- Two special programs in cooperation between TU and DAAD were set up specifically for Ukrainian students and teachers:
 - The "Ukraine Digital" project aims to provide digital teaching offerings for Ukrainian students, facilitating further education even for those residing in Ukraine. For example, the already digitalized course contents of the Master's program "Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability (IMES)" were made accessible with Ukrainian subtitles.
 - Assistance through "Bridge Ukraine Digital" for all teachers from universities in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odessa who came to TU Berlin, allowing them to continue teaching at Ukrainian universities and establish long-term cooperation with related disciplines at TU.

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- The support offering Bridge IT Integration Program for Afghan "IT Alumni at Risk" at TU Berlin, initially created specifically for academics fleeing from Afghanistan, was later extended to Ukrainians as well. It includes the immediate provision of emergency scholarships (about €1,200 monthly) and support for the scholarship recipients in their further development as IT professionals in the German labor market.
- Financial assistance: "TU Berlin can provide smaller sums to assist with urgent needs directly related to studies (e.g., semester contributions for enrollment and re-registration as well as expenses for excursions and teaching materials) for students previously studying in Ukraine who can demonstrate that they are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the war there."

TU's website comprehensively presents and summarizes the educational offerings, counseling centers, and recommendations for Ukrainian refugees.

A detailed search for support for Palestinian refugees is only offered by the DAAD support program.

While specific funding projects are set up for Ukrainian refugee scholars and prospective students, the DAAD cooperating with TU offers only one project for Palestinians, which is solely designed to provide transitional financing for job searching to graduates, postdoctoral fellows, or students who have already completed an internship in Germany. Thus, prospective students with refugee experience cannot be directly supported.

One of the few resources available to them remains: IN2TU Program for Refugees, which allows prospective students, even without enrollment, to gain insight into TU's studies through a guest study program and to participate in lectures and possibly examinations. However, this program does not offer scholarships and is only oriented towards guest studies.

The mentioned Bridge IT is funded by DAAD INTEGRA, coordinated by the Department of International Affairs at TU Berlin. To date, the program mainly supports Afghan academics and has recently been made applicable to Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian refugees as well.

(2) “anti-Palestinian racism”

- Arab Lawyer Associations Definition:
“Anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including: denying

the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies; defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values”

(Arab Canadian Lawyers Association, (April 2022), Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations – Community consultations and reflections, [pdf](#))

Anti-Palestinian racism and anti-palestinian solidarity discrimination are wildly common worldwide. Some studies and researches show not only the amount of documented cases of anti-palestinian racism, but also the increasing tendencies since the start of Israeli war on Gaza:

- Palestine Legal (an independent organization dedicated to protecting the civil and constitutional rights of people in the US who speak out for Palestinian freedom) has documented > 2,200 cases of suppression of Palestinian rights advocacy that the organization addressed from 2014 to 2022. Many of these cases involved harassment and attempts at censorship by university administrations and right-wing groups, intended to intimidate Palestinians and their allies into silence and inaction. Since October 7th, the organization has received reports of over 1,800 incidents, which is over five times the total number reported for all of 2022, indicating a dramatic increase in anti-Palestinian repression across the United States.

[Palestine Legal Report](#)

(3) Context Nationwide:

In the first quarter of 2024, the German police registered 213 anti-Muslim and Islamophobic crimes, highlighting the increase in hatred and discrimination against these groups. In 2023, such crimes more than doubled (1,464) compared to 2022 (610). These crimes included assaults, incitement, insults, property damage, and attacks on mosques (12 cases in Q1 2024). Additionally, there were far-right rallies with racist and Islamophobic slogans. Numerous attacks on refugees and their accommodations were also reported (223 in Q1 2024), with 2,488 such cases in 2023, a 75% increase from 2022. Most of these crimes are classified as "politically right-wing motivated."

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In the private sphere, affected individuals face discrimination and exclusion. According to the Leipzig Authoritarianism Study, almost 40% of respondents feel "like a stranger in their own country" due to the many Muslims. The Government Racism Monitor (2022) reported that 73% of respondents from racialized groups aged 14-24 have experienced racism.

<https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/112/2011292.pdf#page50>

<https://mediendienst-integration.de/desintegration/rassismus.html>

[Antidiskriminierungsstelle - Forschungsprojekte - Diskriminierung aufgrund der islamischen Religionszugehörigkeit im Kontext Arbeitsleben](#)

(4) Discrimination at Universities and Colleges:

Systematic, but often externally invisible discrimination is also present at universities and colleges, sometimes stemming from faculty, advisors, examiners, and university staff. There have been incidents where Muslim female students were denied access to fundamental rights (such as internships) due to their headscarves. ([UniBochum](#))

The Black Student Union (BSU) at Humboldt University reported receiving 11 racist (specifically anti-Black) blackmails in November last year, possibly due to their pro-Palestinian views. A complaint email was sent to the university's administration, which was later read to President Julia von Blumenthal during negotiations with students. It was revealed that there is no clear structure for combating racism at the university. The BSU's concerns were not addressed, and no adequate support was offered to those affected. „BSU members are confirmed in belief that there is no real support of them in the university“: [BSU-HU – Black Student Union](#)

(5) Scholars At Risk reports

a) [2024-04-05 University of Cologne; The New School | Scholars at Risk](#)

University of Cologne (UoC): *"On April 5, 2024, the University of Cologne (UoC) announced the withdrawal of its 2024 Albertus Magnus Professorship because the intended recipient, Nancy Fraser, a professor of philosophy at The New School, had previously signed a letter in support of Palestine."*

"Scholars at Risk is concerned about the withdrawal of an academic position in retaliation for the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression. University officials should respect scholars' exercise of such rights and refrain from disciplinary actions that punish or deter nonviolent expressive activity. In addition to the harm

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to the immediate victim, disciplinary actions intended to deter or punish free expression undermine academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and democratic society generally."

b) [2024-02-07 Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology | Scholars at Risk](#)

Max Planck Institute (MPG) for Social Anthropology: *"On February 7, 2024, Max Planck Institute (MPG) for Social Anthropology announced that it had terminated the contract of Ghassan Hage, an Australian-Lebanese professor and anthropologist, in apparent retaliation for pro-Palestine comments that he made on social media and his support of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel."*

"Scholars at Risk is concerned about the arbitrary dismissal of a scholar for nonviolently exercising his right to freedom of expression – conduct that is expressly protected by international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Germany is a party. In addition to the harm to the immediate victims, dismissals stemming from such activity undermine academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and democratic society generally."

c) [2024-01-07 University of Cologne | Scholars at Risk](#)

University of Cologne (UoC): *"On January 7-8, 2024, the University of Cologne temporarily banned a student from entering the university in order to prevent him from attending a talk by Israeli Ambassador Ron Prosor. The Cologne Administration court later declared the ban illegal."*

"Scholars at Risk is concerned about an attempt by a higher education institution to prevent a student from attending a public, academic, on-campus event. Where there are legitimate security concerns, the university is obligated to take reasonable available measures to ensure security. In the absence of such concerns, bans on student attendance at events undermine academic freedom and democratic society generally."