



AAG

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
of GEOGRAPHERS

A Call for a Just and Lasting Peace: Protecting Higher Education in Gaza as Essential to Human Rights and Self-Determination

The American Association of Geographers (AAG), representing academic and professional geographers worldwide, calls for a just and lasting peace in Palestine, stands in solidarity with all who work towards peace, and champions the protection of higher education in Gaza as essential to human rights and self-determination. As geographers and educators, we call attention to the catastrophic destruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure and pledge solidarity with Palestinian scholars and students. We commit to supporting Palestinian educational reconstruction while fostering inclusive scholarly discourse in which all members, regardless of their views on Israeli-Palestinian politics, can engage freely. We also condemn violence against all civilians and attacks on Jewish and Palestinian scholars.

The current crisis must be understood within its broader historical context. Palestinians have faced entrenched inequalities rooted in the complex legacies of the region's colonial past, decades of occupation, blockade, recurrent violence, and restrictions on daily life — conditions that have steadily weakened educational institutions and scholarly life. More recently, residents in Gaza have experienced what UN experts describe as an "entirely man-made" humanitarian catastrophe. The International Food Security Phase Classification system officially declared famine conditions for half a million people in August 2025, describing "catastrophic conditions characterized by starvation, destitution, and death."

While we condemn the large-scale attacks carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Israeli military campaign, we recognize that the devastating violence of 2023 emerged primarily from decades of oppression and unresolved territorial conflict, particularly in Gaza since the 2007 blockade. We also condemn the antisemitic violence and attacks targeting Jewish people, which have surged globally and on university campuses, creating hostile environments for Jewish students and scholars. The October 7 attacks killed approximately 1,200 Israelis and resulted in over 250 hostages taken to Gaza, while the Israeli military response killed an estimated 70,000 Palestinians.

All 19 of Gaza's universities have suffered severe damage, with 80% of university buildings destroyed. More than 10,000 students and more than 500 educational staff members have been killed. Over 100 academics have been killed, including university presidents and respected scholars. An estimated 625,000 students have been deprived of education for consecutive academic years, while 97% of schools have sustained damage. This extensive destruction of universities, schools, and educational personnel represents a severe blow to Palestinian intellectual and cultural capacity.

We welcome the October 2025 agreement and ceasefire as a crucial step towards sustained, lasting peace. At the same time, it is essential to recognize and uphold human rights and self-determination, to ensure access to food, water, shelter, and medical care, and to restore education as quickly as possible.

The Palestinian right to self-determination is recognized as a fundamental, inalienable right under international law, just as Israel has a right to exist. The UN Human Rights Council has declared self-determination essential for the realization of all other human rights. Without self-determination,

the protection of education, freedom of movement, and basic human dignity becomes impossible. The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Protecting Palestinian educational rights is an essential component of any just and lasting peace. As educators, scholars, and advocates for human rights, we commit to supporting Palestinian academic freedom and educational access. The extensive destruction of Palestinian educational institutions represents an attack not only on individual rights but on the very possibility of Palestinian intellectual and cultural capacity.

We, therefore, call on the international community to take the following actions:

1. Uphold human rights without exception, recognizing that human rights are universal and indivisible.
2. Protect and restore the right to self-determination, recognizing that self-determination is the foundation for realizing all other human rights.
3. Defend education as a fundamental human right, combating attacks on academic freedom.
4. Condemn the targeting of educational institutions as violations of international humanitarian law.
5. Support the rapid reconstruction of Gaza's educational infrastructure.

These commitments extend to our AAG members. The AAG defends the rights of our members to engage in scholarly discourse and advocacy on Palestine without fear of professional retribution, while recognizing that such discourse must always distinguish between legitimate criticism of government policies and antisemitic rhetoric that targets Jewish people. These domestic academic freedom concerns are inseparable from our international solidarity concerns.

The AAG rejects antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racism fully and equally. This includes unequivocal condemnation of violence targeting individuals based on their religious, national, or cultural identity. Academic communities must be spaces where all members, regardless of their political views, can pursue scholarship free from violence, harassment, and discrimination.

The American Association of Geographers (AAG) is a scholarly nonprofit organization that advances professional studies in geography and promotes its application in education, business, and government. Founded in 1904 and based in Washington, D.C., the AAG represents about 9,000 members across nearly 100 countries, with specialties spanning the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.

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