

US Scholars to President Biden: You Must Act Now to Prevent Genocide in Gaza

Academics Across America Demand Immediate Ceasefire, Restoration of Humanitarian Aid, and a Just Resolution in Israel-Palestine

By [Academics Across America](#)

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February 14, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden:

We, the undersigned scholars at colleges and universities across the United States, are writing in the strongest possible terms to express our disapproval of your administration's ongoing policy in Israel-Palestine, especially the Gaza Strip, and to advise a better way forward.

For over 120 days now, we have witnessed the [staggering civilian casualties](#) of Israel's war on Gaza which has, on average, [killed one child every eight minutes](#), [killed two mothers every hour](#), and caused [10 children to lose one or both legs](#) in Gaza every day. The decimation of medical infrastructure and the restriction of basic necessities including food and clean water by Israel's blockade have left [1.1 million children threatened by malnutrition and preventable disease](#). Some 2 million Palestinians ([85% of Gaza's population](#)) have been forced from their homes which, like [every university](#) in Gaza and some [390 educational institutions](#) overall, have been largely demolished and reduced to rubble. Indeed, in 100 days, Israel dropped nearly 30,000 bombs and shells on Gaza—eight

times more than the [US used in Iraq in six years](#). The fact that this [unprecedented](#) carnage and destruction is being carried out with US weapons your administration has continued to provide to the Netanyahu government—without conditions, [bypassing Congress](#) to do so, and while blocking calls for a ceasefire—is indefensible.

We unequivocally condemn any attacks on civilians, whether they are [Israelis or Palestinians](#) or anyone else in the human family. Hence, we condemn all atrocities committed against Israeli civilians by Hamas or other armed groups on October 7, 2023. Moreover, we condemn any deliberate, callous, or grossly negligent acts of violence harming a single civilian—especially but not limited to children—anywhere in the world, at any time.

We therefore urge your administration to apply human rights, international humanitarian law, and US pressure consistently, not only when it comes to the attacks committed by Hamas or other militants on [October 7, 2023](#), which killed an estimated 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals, including 36 children. Upholding this basic moral and legal principle demands that American officials also condemn the Israeli military's siege and bombardment of Gaza that has [now](#) killed over 27,000 Palestinians, including [at least](#) 10,000 children. Yet, Mr. President, you have not only failed to condemn the ongoing massacre in Gaza. You have enabled it.

When our political leaders fail to act or even speak out against the [injustices of the age](#), we believe it is the responsibility of scholars, writers, artists, and other civic, educational, and [moral leaders](#) to break the silence. We also believe in speaking candidly and plainly to the US public, not mincing words, especially as the Israeli military has used on average more lethal force than [any other conflict in the twenty-first century](#) to decimate civilian life and infrastructure in Gaza, rendering the territory virtually [uninhabitable](#).

Given the [unprecedented](#) scale, duration, and nature of Israel's ongoing assault and [multiple statements](#) by Israeli officials conveying an [intent to destroy all of Gaza](#) under the pretext of destroying Hamas, there are substantial risks that [genocide](#) is unfolding in Gaza right now. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has found this charge plausible in its interim ruling on January 26, 2024 in [South Africa v. Israel](#), and, more recently, a United States federal district judge has [declared](#) that “the current treatment of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military may plausibly constitute a genocide in violation of international law.” These developments have only strengthened our resolve to speak out against atrocities taking place with US support in real time.

Mr. President, to save countless more lives, to prevent a spiral into wider regional war, and to disassociate the US and [your administration](#) from further complicity in gross human rights violations and war crimes, including the substantial risk of genocide, we urge you to take the following actions:

(1) Demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Israel-Palestine and an end to Israel's blockade so that food, water, medicine, electricity, fuel, and other [lifesaving](#) necessities can reach Palestinian civilians facing starvation, disease, and exposure to the elements, to the scale of need. Furthermore, only with a ceasefire can aid teams rescue or recover the estimated [8,000 Palestinians trapped or dead under the rubble](#).

(2) Demand the peaceful release of all remaining Israeli hostages and Palestinian political prisoners through further negotiations. Many of the estimated [7,000 Palestinian prisoners](#)

[and detainees](#) currently held by Israel are children or adolescents, and a large proportion are being detained indefinitely without charge. We also note that the release of [virtually all of the 110 Israeli hostages who have returned to their families](#) alive thus far was secured by truce, negotiation, or prisoner exchange.

(3) Refrain from [dismissing](#) legal proceedings underway at the ICJ, and here we specify [South Africa's genocide case against Israel](#), which prominent US officials described as “meritless,” “counterproductive,” and “without any basis in fact whatsoever,” even before leading scholarly authorities on genocide submitted their testimony. Moreover, US spokespersons should avoid promoting Israeli government accusations which [independent investigations](#) have debunked or cast serious doubts upon. As scholars and educators, we cannot overstate the importance of accurate reporting and statements by US officials to help deescalate this conflict, to honor victims and bring an end to the violence, and to establish accountability for [all](#) crimes committed since October 7.

(4) Support the authority of the ICJ and the [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) to investigate alleged genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes—including but not limited to extrajudicial killings, mass murder, sexual violence, hostage-taking, arbitrary detention and unlawful confinement, torture, wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure, and use of starvation—committed by all armed parties in Israel-Palestine from October 7, 2023 until the end of hostilities. Our federal [Leahy Law](#) demands that particular attention be paid to gross human rights violations carried out with [US-provided weapons](#) and to the attendant civilian toll in Gaza, which leading [humanitarian](#) and [human rights](#) agencies, [journalists](#), and [academics](#)—including [multiple scholars of genocide and the Holocaust](#)—warn may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and [genocide](#). Furthermore, as a signatory to the UN Genocide Convention and relevant legal protocols, the US must be ready to assist in the enforcement of existing and future [ICJ](#) and [ICC](#) judgments through the UN Security Council, including the ICJ's [provisional measures](#) of January 26 ordering Israel to prevent a genocide against the Palestinians and to report on all measures taken to implement the Court's orders within one month.

(5) Immediately restore funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Not only is the US at risk of being complicit in the commission of genocide but it will also be violating its separate affirmative obligation to prevent genocide if the US does not take every measure at its disposal to ensure the implementation of the ICJ provisional measures, and here we specify the provision of humanitarian aid to the scale of need. As [multiple humanitarian agencies](#) and [genocide prevention experts](#) have expressly warned, the withdrawal of funding for UNRWA threatens to impede the provision of humanitarian aid in Gaza when food, water, and other necessities are already scarce, and thereby represents a shift “from potential complicity in genocide to direct involvement in engineered famine.” Such actions contribute to conditions likely to result in the destruction of the Palestinian people in whole or in part—in other words, genocide.

(6) In light of our domestic and international legal obligations, immediately halt the transfer of weapons, munitions, and other military equipment to any parties of the conflict in Israel-Palestine. This freeze must apply not only to the Israeli government and Hamas, but to any armed groups and private citizens in Israel-Palestine including the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Golan, until the atrocities of October 7, 2023 and since have been thoroughly and impartially investigated by the ICJ and/or the ICC; and until sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure against continued and future violations of US and international law.

We are not alone in our concerns. In mid-October 2023, [over 300 US legal scholars](#) warned your administration about the dangers of supporting PM Netanyahu’s open-ended war on Gaza, including foreseeable war crimes and a humanitarian catastrophe in the making. On November 8, signaling unease, [26 United States Senators](#) (to be copied on this letter) requested assurances from you on the legality and viability of Israel’s military operations in Gaza—including the safety of Israeli hostages and Palestinian civilians—and whether the fight against Hamas would not “produce the same strategic mistakes as many US military operations over the past few decades.” And on December 11, [leading US humanitarian agencies](#) described the unprecedented catastrophe generated by Israel’s air strikes and blockade of Gaza’s population—half of whom are children, all of whom face the prospect of [starvation](#) and [fatal diseases](#) if they survive what [you have yourself characterized](#) as Israel’s effectively [indiscriminate bombing campaign](#).

Mr. President, with all due respect, there is simply no explanation that PM Netanyahu—or you—could offer to justify this ongoing massacre and [weaponization of humanitarian aid](#) against the people of Gaza. You must heed these warnings, which have emanated even from [within your own administration](#). As scholars and educators, we object in the strongest possible terms to the [collective punishment of Palestinians](#), including the [use of starvation](#) as a war tactic and the recent [suspension of US support for UNRWA](#), a lifeline for Gaza’s 2.2 million people. Such grossly disproportionate policies are not only cruel and immoral. They are [unlawful](#) and [will not enhance the security of Israelis, Palestinians, or Americans](#). We hold, therefore, that the path to peace is not and cannot be through killing, starving, displacing, or ethnically cleansing Palestinians. The path to peace requires meaningfully recognizing not only the human rights and aspirations of Israelis, but the equal human rights and aspirations of Palestinians to freedom, self-determination, and safety, as well.

Finally, we call on you as our President to demand that care and vigilance be extended to all threatened and vulnerable communities here in the United States. Protecting our Jewish, Arab, and Muslim students, and our Palestinian and Israeli students, is not a zero-sum game. They are intertwined responsibilities for us, and so should it be for you and [Congress](#). Hence, we reject antisemitism as we reject [anti-Palestinian](#), anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim prejudice and any other form of racism, bigotry, or hate speech, on and off our campuses. We also reject the [weaponizing of antisemitism](#) to silence legitimate criticism of Israeli state policies and those speaking up for Palestinian human rights. Ultimately, a just and peaceful resolution between Palestinians and Israelis is the only way to heal the [tensions and polarization tearing apart college campuses](#), including [university administrations](#), and rippling across US society at large.

As academics, we place a premium on the advancement of just, peaceful, and collaborative resolutions to shared problems, based on credible evidence, critical inquiry, and social responsibility. We expect the same of our leaders. And as long as you are President of the United States of America, we expect nothing less of you.

Sincerely,

3,700+ Signatories and growing. For current signatories, click [here](#).

University and college faculty, instructors, fellows, and research associates anywhere in the United States can sign this open letter.

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