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Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine
British Committee for Universities for Palestine
Campagna Diritto allo Studio e Libertà Accademica in Palestina
Comissió Universitària Catalana per Palestina

Dear Member of the European Parliament

We are scientists and educators representing a broad segment of the academic community in Europe, and we are writing this letter to protest against moves to upgrade the existing relationship between the European Union and Israel.

Following a meeting in June 2008 between the European Union and Israel, the Council of the EU announced its "*determination to upgrade the level and intensity of its bilateral relations with Israel*" with the intention of adopting a new agreement, replacing the Joint Action Plan of 2005, by April 2009. In the wake of the outrage provoked by the Israeli military Operation Cast Lead against the population of the Gaza Strip, the plans were shelved and no deadline has been announced for their implementation. Nevertheless, there have been persistent rumors that a comprehensive upgrade is still on the agenda. Last November the EU and Israel signed a new agreement on trade in agricultural products, presented as "*a major step forward in the integration of the EU and Israeli markets*." Similarly, a proposed agreement "*on conformity assessment and acceptance of industrial products*", announced on March 22 by the EU Foreign Affairs Council, who plan "*to forward a draft decision on the conclusion of the protocol to the European Parliament for its consent*", is identified explicitly as "*an important step towards Israel's integration in the Single Market*." Despite Israel's well-publicized intransigence on settlements and failure to negotiate in good faith with its Palestinian counterpart, the examples mentioned above suggest the EU Council has nevertheless chosen to implement the upgrade one sector at a time.

To justify our opposition, we need look no further than the EU Council's own statement concerning the process: "*That building-up must be based on the shared values of both parties, and particularly on democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, good governance and international humanitarian law*."

Clauses referring to respect for human rights and international law have been a constant feature of bilateral agreements between the EU and Israel. Even the supporters of these agreements find it hard to reconcile these provisions, notably Article 2 of the EU-Israel

association agreement, with Israel's continuing occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and its military blockade of Gaza. Following the devastation of Gaza in early 2009, and the severe indictment by the Goldstone report of Israel's actions in that war, voices have increasingly been raised to protest the failure of the EU to respect its own commitment to these clauses. Just this March, the European Parliament, referring to the "*responsibility and the credibility of the European Union and of its member states*", called for "*the implementation of [the Goldstone report's] recommendations and accountability for all violations of international law, including alleged war crimes*".

Yet the upgrade continues, gradually, surreptitiously, and in complete disregard of the EU's stated commitment to human rights and international law. As British MPs Clare Short and Derek Wyatt wrote last autumn, "*the European Commission and member states are failing in their duty to uphold the conditions of our own treaty with Israel and to use these requirements to obtain long-term peace and justice*".

As scientists and educators, we are especially concerned about the situation of our Palestinian colleagues, and their students, at universities in the Palestinian territories as well as in Israel. Those of us who have visited the West Bank and Gaza can bear witness to the many ways in which the normal course of studies and research is disrupted. For instance, three soldiers are enough to set up a checkpoint at the entrance of a Palestinian university; they will control comings and goings at leisure, so that students and professors will spend their day in the waiting line instead of the lecture rooms. This is so commonplace an occurrence that it does not even make the news, but it is a day lost for the university, which will be made up with difficulty during the academic year. Such vexations and humiliations are innumerable, and appear to be deliberately intended to destroy any hope that students or professors might have of reasonable working conditions, and to show them that the only possible way to a normal education is by leaving their country.

In the meantime, we see Israeli science developing in directions with which we deeply disagree. The occupation of Palestinian territories, the subjection of the native population to arbitrary control, and the surveillance of the Gaza strip would be too labour-intensive for the Israeli army to handle without the help of technology. This technology includes rudimentary devices like roadblocks and separation walls, which crowd Palestinians into separate neighbourhoods, allowing for easy control as they move through the few available openings from one area to another. But there are also very sophisticated devices: the drones that fly permanently over Gaza, terrorizing the population who know full well that a deadly strike may come from them at any time; the remote-control bulldozers, used during the Gaza invasion to destroy Palestinian commercial buildings, dwellings and fields; or the fiber optic cables used to detect tunnels between Gaza and Egypt. Designing the technology supporting such operations, carried out in total disregard of human life and basic rights, is not a legitimate scientific activity. Yet the Israeli universities participating in the EU association agreement are deeply involved in the development of such technology: the three instances just cited are all taken from the website of Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology. Intellectual support is provided by the development within academia of new theories on "proportionality" and "acceptable

death ratio”, basically counting how many civilians it is “allowable” to kill during a military operation.

We are very much afraid that the (absence of) values informing such developments may be carried over to Europe, where the fruits of progress of a thousand years, such as Habeas Corpus in Great Britain or the Declaration of Rights in France, may be thoughtlessly swept away under the guise of scientific or technological progress.

After the Oslo agreements in 1992, many of us put our faith in academic cooperation between Europe, Israel and Palestine, as a confidence-building step for both sides and a way of training the leadership of a future Palestinian state. After almost twenty years of fruitless efforts, during which time Israel has continuously created new “facts on the ground”, that is to say illegal settlements, in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and turned the Gaza strip into little more than an open-air prison, submitted to a strict blockade of even basic supplies, we think the time is long overdue to put pressure on the Israeli government.

We therefore urge you to oppose any upgrading of the existing agreement between the EU and Israel. On the contrary, we urge you to apply Article 2 of the existing treaty, and suspend all cooperation, as the European Parliament already demanded in April 2002, until Israel fulfills its obligations under international law, notably the Fourth Geneva convention, to enable the population of the occupied territories to enjoy the rights due to all people: the right to travel, the right to trade, the right to education, the right to property, the right to the protection of the law.

With our best regards

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