

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Report for Swedish Universities

Academic boycott as an act
of justice for Palestine
(Summary)

Workers and Students in Swedish
Academia for Palestine (WASSAP)

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This report was authored by a group of concerned students and workers based in universities across Sweden.

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Contents

Introduction	4
The Gaza Genocide and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions	6
The Complicity of Swedish Academic Institutions	9
The Responsibility of Swedish Academic Institutions and the Call to Boycott	12
Conclusion	14
References	15

Introduction

Academic freedom is the cornerstone of intellectual inquiry. It protects scholars' ability to research, teach, and debate ideas without censorship or interference. But like all freedoms, academic freedom carries with it a corresponding *responsibility*—an aspect that has often received less attention in institutional discourse. This is, for instance, the case in Sweden. It is in the question of academic responsibility that the latest report written by *Workers and Students in Swedish Academia for Palestine* (WASSAP) titled *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Report for Swedish Universities: Academic boycott as an act of justice for Palestine* (WASSAP, 2025) takes its point of departure.

What follows is a summary of the report, which builds on the call to boycott Israeli academic institutions. One of the clearest expressions of academic responsibility today lies in the decisions scholars and institutions make about whom they collaborate with. In a globalized academic environment, partnerships are not just vehicles for research—they are ethical and political acts that signal endorsement, allocate resources, and shape institutional legitimacy. While collaborations can advance important goals, they also risk reinforcing structures of inequality and repression. For this reason, academic responsibility includes critically reflecting upon whether institutional relationships uphold the values of human rights, sustainability, and justice—or undermine them.

As students and scholars in Swedish academia we take the issue of academic freedom and responsibility seriously. It was precisely the intersection between academic responsibility and institutional collaboration that led to the formation of WASSAP. We understand academic responsibility to mean the obligation to ensure that scholarly work—including research partnerships, funding arrangements, and institutional affiliations—does not contribute, directly or indirectly, to harm, repression, or the erosion of human rights. In October 2023, in response to Israel's genocidal escalation of violence in Gaza, and the systematic destruction of its educational infrastructure, students and staff from across Swedish universities, belonging to a range of disciplines and campuses, came together to question how our own institutions might be implicated. WASSAP emerged as a platform for collective reflection and action: to examine how Swedish universities, through their formal partnerships with Israeli institutions, may be entangled in structures of occupation, apartheid, and state violence. These concerns were not limited to individual academic choices, but extended to the institutional frameworks that shape—and often normalize—complicity.

Our report is one outcome of that work, and it is shaped by the contributions of countless staff, students, and partner organizations across Swedish universities who share a commitment to ethical academic practice. The report seeks to document how Swedish universities, through their ongoing partnerships with Israeli academic institutions, are complicit in the normalization of apartheid, occupation, and genocide. It outlines the legal,

ethical, and political responsibilities of Swedish academic institutions, exposes the structural complicity of Israeli universities, and presents evidence of specific collaborations that violate both international human rights norms and the values Swedish universities claim to uphold. In doing so, the report makes a clear case: that ending these collaborations is not only a moral imperative, but a necessary act of academic responsibility.

The remaining summary first accounts for the complicity of Israeli academic institutions in the ongoing apartheid, occupation, and genocide. Then it outlines current connections between Swedish academic institutions and Israeli institutions, addressing the role of Swedish universities in the normalization and legitimization of institutions implicated in serious violations of international law. Thereafter, it addresses the responsibilities of Swedish academic institutions, outlining the imperatives for and importance of an academic boycott of Israeli institutions.

The Gaza Genocide and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions

Genocide—defined by the 1948 UN Convention as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group—is recognized as the most egregious crime under international law. It encompasses not only mass killings but also actions that deliberately inflict conditions of life calculated to destroy a people (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, art. 2). Genocidal intent can be inferred from patterns of conduct, especially when a state targets civilians with systematic violence and dehumanizing rhetoric.

Israel's ongoing military campaign in Gaza, launched in October 2023, has reached a scale and character that, according to the [UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine](#) (United Nations General Assembly, 2024), [Amnesty International](#) (Amnesty International, 2024), and numerous legal experts and human rights organizations, constitutes genocide. Documented evidence includes indiscriminate bombardment, mass civilian casualties, the targeted destruction of hospitals, universities, and homes, the forced displacement of around 90% of the entire population (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 2025), the intentional denial of food, water, and fuel, and public statements by Israeli officials expressing genocidal aims and intent (Amnesty International, 2024). This violence, however, is not an aberration but the latest phase in a protracted project of settler-colonial domination that began with the Nakba in 1948—the mass expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of hundreds of villages. In the decades since, the Israeli state has sustained and deepened its regime of military occupation, apartheid, and territorial expansion through repeated invasions, illegal settlement building, and the systemic denial of Palestinian self-determination.

While this may appear to be a distant political matter, it is crucial to understand that academic institutions are not detached observers. Israeli universities have played—and continue to play—a central role in enabling, sustaining, and normalizing the structure of apartheid, occupation, and now genocide. They have long functioned as integral components of the state's settler-colonial and military apparatus, at times serving as key engines of legitimization, innovation, and operational support for the systematic oppression and violence inflicted

on Palestinians. Their complicity is neither incidental nor recent—it is structural and historic, dating back to their founding roles during and even before the Nakba of 1948. This complicity manifests in a range of practices: the hosting of military bases and training programs on campus; the development of weapons and military technologies in collaboration with arms manufacturers and the Israeli Ministry of Defense; and the provision of logistical and technological support to the Israeli military, including in the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Israeli universities have also played an active role in shaping national security policies and military doctrines that entrench the occupation and facilitate war crimes. In parallel, they have reinforced the settlement project by establishing campuses on expropriated Palestinian land, and have engaged in the suppression of Palestinian voices through disciplinary actions, surveillance, and institutional harassment. A more thorough description of the role Israeli universities play in the oppression of Palestinians can be found in sections 2.3 and 3.1 of the full report.

The following table provides a few examples of how these forms of complicity materialize across various Israeli universities, each of which plays a distinct yet interconnected role in sustaining the systems of occupation, apartheid, and military violence.

University	Forms of Complicity
Hebrew University of Jerusalem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Hosts a military base. → Provides logistical support for Gaza assault. → Targeted a Palestinian professor through suspension, pressure, and harassment, leading to her resignation.
Tel Aviv University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Shapes national security policies like the Dahiya Doctrine which calls for targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure with "disproportionate force" to inflict devastating destruction.
Technion – Israel Institute of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Partners with Elbit Systems, one of the largest Israeli weapons companies. → Helped develop D9 bulldozer used in home demolitions. → Helped develop acoustic weapons used in protest suppression.
University of Haifa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Collaborates with Ministry of Foreign Affairs in "Hasbara" propaganda training. → Provides training programs for IDF. → Provides equipment to soldiers.
Bar-Ilan University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Established college in illegal settlement. → Collaborates with Israeli military, arms producers and the Shin Bet, which is Israel's internal intelligence agency.
Weizmann Institute of Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Helps the development of Israeli military industries. → Offers programs and courses for soldiers. → Collaborates extensively with arms manufacturers.
Reichman University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Hosts counter-terrorism institute praising accused war criminals. → Celebrates students' involvement in Gaza destruction. → Hosts military-dominated Herzliya Conference.
Ariel University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Built on an illegal West Bank settlement.
Bezalel University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Organized student/faculty volunteer teams to produce gear for the IDF during Gaza war.
Ben-Gurion University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Hosts Homeland Security Institute with defense ties.
Beit Berl College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Hosts pre-military training program (Be'eri Mechina) to prepare students for IDF service, including physical training.
Open University of Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Publicly supports elite IDF units. → Offers degree programs during military service.

The Complicity of Swedish Academic Institutions

While the actions of Israeli academic institutions lie beyond the jurisdiction of Swedish universities, continued institutional collaboration with these institutions contributes to the normalization and international legitimization of entities implicated in serious violations of international law, including apartheid, military occupation, and genocide. Through joint research initiatives, student mobility programs, and formal agreements, Swedish universities risk entrenching ties with institutions that are structurally embedded in the Israeli state's apparatus of violence and repression. Since October 2023, a systematic effort has been undertaken to document these connections through freedom of information requests submitted to Swedish universities. Despite the legal obligation to provide such information, several institutions have failed to respond or have issued refusals. Nonetheless, a substantial number of active collaborations have been identified through official disclosures and independent inquiries. This list summarizes the collaborations listed in section 3.2 of the full report.

Swedish University

Collaborations with Israeli Institutions

Gothenburg University

→ Multiple EU-funded research projects: REDRESS (University of Haifa), HRJUST (University of Haifa), PANACEA (Weizmann Institute of Science), privately funded projects such as NNF Microbiome Health Initiative (Weizmann Institute of Science), and a student exchange program with Reichman University.

Karolinska Institute

→ Student and teacher exchange with Hebrew University of Jerusalem; research collaboration with Weizmann Institute of Science.

Linköping University

→ Agreements with Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the University of Haifa, Bar-Ilan University, Technion, and Ben-Gurion University.

Malmö University

→ Extensive agreement with Ben-Gurion University involving research, staff, and student exchanges.

Stockholm University

→ Multiple partnerships including Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Beit Berl College, and University of Haifa.

Uppsala University

→ Collaborations with Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University; limited responses to FOI requests.

Lund University

→ Active collaborations with Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion University, Technion, Weizmann Institute, and Tel Aviv University; various EU and Erasmus+ programs.

Chalmers University of Technology

→ Part of ISLANDS doctoral network with Weizmann Institute; collaborative project with Bar-Ilan University on autonomous vehicles; and additional projects with Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University.

Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)

→ Collaboration with Technion via Horizon Europe project; Memorandum of Understanding with Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Örebro University

→ Student mobility program with Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

To the best of our knowledge, the following Swedish universities and colleges do not have any institutional collaborations with Israeli universities: Umeå University, Luleå University of Technology, Karlstads university, Linnaeus University, Mid Sweden University, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Blekinge Institute of Technology, Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Borås, Halmstad University, University of Skövde, Kristianstad University, University West, Södertörn University, University of Gävle, Dalarna University College, Stockholm University of the Arts, Royal Institute of Art, Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Swedish Defence Conscription and Assessment Agency, Swedish Defence University, and Konstfack.

In addition to collaborations with Israeli academic institutions, Swedish universities maintain strategic partnerships with multinational corporations complicit in Israeli state violence. Uppsala University, for example, lists Hitachi as one of its strategic partners—a company known to supply bulldozers used in the demolition of Palestinian homes, the expansion of illegal settlements, and the construction of infrastructure for Israeli police and military operations. Such connections demonstrate how institutional complicity is not limited to formal academic agreements but extends through investment portfolios, procurement decisions, and corporate alliances that indirectly support, and materially benefit from, Israel's system of apartheid and occupation.

The Responsibility of Swedish Academic Institutions and the Call to Boycott

Swedish universities are legally and ethically obligated to uphold the principles of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and responsible internationalization. These obligations are clearly articulated in the Swedish Constitution, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the Higher Education Act. Collectively, these frameworks establish that universities not only have the right to conduct international collaborations independently of government direction, but that they must do so in a way that promotes human rights, justice, and sustainable development.

Given the well documented role of Israeli academic institutions in the oppression of Palestinians, as well as in the ongoing genocide, Swedish universities must cut ties with these institutions. Current partnerships continue in violation of the ethical standards articulated in the “Checklist for Global Responsible Engagement” published by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF), which many Swedish universities formally endorse. This checklist advises against collaboration with institutions located in states that systematically violate human rights or academic freedom—conditions that independent legal bodies, including the United Nations and international courts, have found apply to the Israeli state and its academic institutions. Swedish universities cannot simultaneously claim to uphold human rights and academic freedom while refusing to take action against institutions that support and legitimize apartheid, occupation, and genocide. By continuing collaborations with Israeli academic institutions, our universities are not neutral actors—they are complicit.

If universities are to maintain their credibility and fulfill their mission as spaces for ethical inquiry, critical thought, and social responsibility, they must immediately reassess and sever these partnerships. This is in line with the principles of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). BDS is a long-standing international movement that challenges the legitimacy of Israel’s military regime by urging institutions, states, and corporations to sever ties with Israel. The academic boycott, guided by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), targets Israeli institutions—not individual scholars. It holds accountable those universities and research bodies that actively support or are complicit in the occupation and oppression of Palestinians. In accordance with PACBI’s (2014) guidelines, the boycott respects the distinction between institutions and individuals and is aligned with

the UN definition of academic freedom (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999; see also Scholars at Risk, 2023).

A boycott is a non-violent and necessary tool that demands Swedish universities take meaningful steps to sever their ties with Israeli academic institutions, as long as those institutions continue to deny Palestinians their right to self-determination and return. The report particularly situates an academic boycott as an act of justice for Palestine. Hence, conceptualizing justice as the concrete action that our universities can take to undermine the Israeli violence and apartheid that is supported through their own universities and, by extension, by universities worldwide who decide to collaborate with them. We know that justice is something that must be realized through our collective action and we recognize the small, though not insignificant, role that Swedish universities should play towards this realization. A more detailed description of the call to boycott and its motivation is found in section 1.2 of our full report.

As students and staff at Swedish universities, we demand our own universities to take concrete action. We recognize that the actions we demand of Swedish universities today are only one small part of the larger movement for Palestine, but we nonetheless are empowered by the fact that it is within our power as workers, academics, and students in Swedish academia to engage in an academic boycott. Our demands to our universities remain, but we also reach out to those within Swedish academia, who perhaps have thus far remained silent or unsure. We are also speaking to you. We implore you, together with us, to take concrete action for Palestine in our shared university life today.

Conclusion

Swedish universities can still end their complicity in the Israeli apartheid regime, scholasticide, and genocide. It is not too late to practice the intellectual autonomy and ethical conduct that universities claim to be constituted and guided by. It is now up to the universities to prove that they genuinely embody the open and democratic spaces they claim to be. We therefore implore our universities to stand for justice, justice for all and everywhere, even when our own governments fail to do so.

Believing in the power and emancipatory potential of higher education we conclude by calling for our universities to fulfill these inseparable demands:

1. Ending all formal collaborations with Israeli universities and other complicit institutions, in accordance with the PACBI guidelines;
2. Establishing collaborations with Palestinian universities, including providing meaningful support to displaced Palestinian academics and students, offering them a place to study and work at Swedish universities;
3. Upholding the freedoms of assembly and speech for academic workers and students, with special attention to discussions related to Palestine. Opposing the systemic censoring and underfunding of pro-Palestine groups both in academia and in general.

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