



Date:22/05/2024

## **Webinar: Seven Months of Genocide in Gaza – Global Suppression of Pro-Palestine Protests**

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) organised a critical webinar on Tuesday, May 21, entitled "[Seven Months of Genocide in Gaza: Global Suppression of Pro-Palestine Protests](#)" to address the ongoing genocide in Gaza by Israeli occupation forces. The webinar focused on the blockade of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the suppression of protests worldwide against these atrocities.

The webinar featured a distinguished panel of speakers from diverse backgrounds and fields of expertise, including Dr Lex Takkenberg- Senior Advisor with Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, Richard Boyd Barrett- Member of the Irish Parliament, Jeff Halper- American/Israeli Anthropologist, Author, and Political Activist, Dr Elliott Colla – Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, Prof. S. Michael Lynk – Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Dr. William A. Booth – Latin American History Lecturer, UCL, Prof Dan Kovalik- American Professor and Human Rights Lawyer, Bill Law – Editor of Arab Digest, Asmaa Abo Baker El-Fiky- History Undergrad at King's College London, Marcelo Thomas- Student from Sorbonne University in France, Eslem Demiral- Student at ETH Zürich.

In his speech, Richard Boyd Barrett, a member of the Irish Parliament, highlighted the stark contrasts between the attitudes of students and ordinary members of the public towards the genocidal horrors suffered by the Palestinian people, especially those in Gaza, and the attitudes of governments towards the same crisis. He emphasised that while everyone witnesses this horror, the responses from governments, particularly the Irish government, are notably different from the sentiments expressed by students, academic staff, working people, and the general public.



Barrett drew attention to the Irish Famine commemoration held over the weekend, an annual official government event. He pointed out that this famine, one of the greatest horrors inflicted on the Irish people, was essentially orchestrated by British colonial policy, particularly through the Penal Laws. These laws were akin to apartheid, systematically discriminating against the Catholic population to subjugate Ireland as a colony and create divisions among its people to suppress national liberation movements. As a result, the Irish population halved from eight million to four million over forty years, and it has never fully recovered. This historical trauma deeply ingrains solidarity among the Irish people for the Palestinian cause, as they identify with the apartheid laws and colonial policies oppressing the Palestinian people, particularly the Israeli government's plan to starve the population of Gaza.

Barrett expressed outrage that the Irish Government invited the Israeli Ambassador to the famine commemoration, calling it a disgrace and a revulsion felt widely among the public. He raised this issue in the Irish Parliament, condemning it as an insult not only to the people of Gaza and Palestine but also to the memory of those who suffered during the Irish famine. He described it as trampling on Irish history and heritage while being an egregious affront to the suffering people of Gaza.

In contrast, Barrett praised the response of students and the public, noting the enormous and unprecedented protests over the past seven months, particularly on college campuses. He reported a significant increase in student activism, with campouts and occupations similar to those seen in the United States, Britain, and other parts of the world. He was delighted to announce that student protests at Trinity College, one of Ireland's premier universities, resulted in the institution agreeing to complete boycotts, divestments, and the severance of all connections with Israeli institutions within a week of their encampment.

Barrett expressed hope despite the dire situation for the people of Gaza and the hypocritical standards of Western governments. He found solace in the level of solidarity, mobilisation, and protest erupting worldwide, insisting that anyone with a shred of humanity should stand with the victims of genocide and demand their governments break all ties with regimes capable of committing such heinous crimes.

In his contribution, Prof. S. Michael Lynk, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, emphasised the significance of this moment, noting the growing international solidarity with indispensable human rights organisations



globally and in the Middle East, which have been striving tirelessly for peace, freedom, and justice for Palestine.

Lynk highlighted the inspiring nature of the student protests, noting the collective and creative organisation over issues of rights, justice, occupation, and dispossession happening thousands of kilometers away from the protesters. He emphasised that these student encampments and protests are protected by the universal freedoms of expression and assembly, which are embedded in the constitutions of many countries in the global North. He stressed that the law recognizes the right to dissent and that universities are incubators of debate and argument. Historically, many significant social movements, from protests against the Vietnam War to those against apartheid in South Africa and the climate emergency, originated and grew on university campuses worldwide.

Lynk shed light on the ongoing struggle between using the law in the service of power versus using it in the service of justice. He pointed out that this struggle is currently evident, particularly in the US, but also in other global North countries, where universities employ police and the courts to curb and suppress student encampments and protests. He noted that the political right in many countries has attacked the legitimacy of these protests, accusing them of anti-Semitism, supporting Hamas, and representing only privileged, naive, violent, and undisciplined students. Lynk reminded the audience that every major student protest movement over the past six decades has faced similar attacks on their goals, tactics, and supposed naivety, as power always reacts this way to longstanding claims for justice.

He called on those not directly involved in the protests to ensure they distinguish the justice of the students' claims from the predicted objections of those who support the injustice of the Israeli occupation, have no criticism for the unfolding genocide, and support the moral blindness of universities indifferent to the impact of their investments in Israel and their academic relationships with Israeli institutions.

Lynk concluded with a message for the students who have brought attention to the war crimes and the unfolding genocide in Gaza and Palestine. He noted the nobling images from Palestinians in Rafah and Khan Younis, who created posters of support and thanks to the students worldwide, demonstrating the indispensability of human solidarity. He urged everyone to keep the students' humanity and solidarity in mind and heart, reinforcing the importance of continuing their efforts.



Dr. Lex Takkenberg, Senior Advisor with Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, highlighted his observations of the extraordinary, courageous, and promising student protests occurring in various parts of the world. He emphasised that these protests are integral to the work being done by his organisation, a social justice NGO based in Amman, Jordan, particularly as part of their Question of Palestine program.

Takkenberg emphasised the importance of the courageous actions of South Africa and others who have used the law to support accountability for the atrocities and genocide in Gaza. He highlighted the extraordinary courage of ordinary people, both in the Global South and the West, who distance themselves from the Western elites perpetuating the war. He noted the significant support and mobilisation seen over the past weeks and months, which have made a substantial impact, demonstrating the growing gap between Western elites and the rest of the world.

He shed light on the reactions to the recent application by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) requesting arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant. Takkenberg noted both hope and disappointment among Palestinians, who had expected the application to extend to genocide, resettlements, and other issues. He remarked that this situation reflects the gradual progress expected from student movements, where small steps ultimately break down institutionalized injustice on the scale witnessed in the Palestinian struggle.

Takkenberg concluded by acknowledging the extraordinary times and signs of hope amid challenging circumstances. He stated that these developments inspire continued efforts and a renewed commitment to the struggle for Palestinian liberation and justice.

Jeff Halper, an American/Israeli anthropologist, author, and political activist, spoke from Jerusalem, emphasising his involvement with the Palestinian-led organisation, the One Democratic State Campaign. He highlighted the significance of the student protests that began in the United States and spread to Europe and other parts of the world, noting their crucial role in demonstrating solidarity with Palestinians.

Halper underscored the broader impact of these protests beyond solidarity. He emphasised that while governments often operate on a transactional basis, focusing little on justice, human rights, international law, and peace, the student protests have effectively put governments on notice. He pointed out that the public, concerned with



these values, refuses to surrender to transactional politics. Halper warned that political leaders, including President Biden, could face electoral consequences due to their policies on Gaza and Palestine.

He reinforced the idea that these protests have strengthened the position of international law and human rights in international politics, showing that the public is capable of rising up and demanding justice. Additionally, Halper highlighted the intersectional nature of the protests, noting that this has been a key characteristic of the young generation's activism.

Prof. Dan Kovalik, an American professor and human rights lawyer, built on the remarks made by his Irish colleague, emphasising the parallels between the situation in Gaza and various colonial famines, including the Irish famine and the famine imposed on indigenous people in North America by settlers. He stressed that the goal of these famines was genocide, aiming to wipe out the indigenous population, in this case, the Palestinian population.

Kovalik highlighted that the International Criminal Court (ICC) is seeking warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant for the famine they are imposing on the Palestinian people, pointing out that we are witnessing an attempt to eradicate the Palestinians of Gaza. He noted that various Israeli officials have been very open about their intention to make Gaza unlivable, a goal they have largely achieved. He detailed the destruction of water aquifers, hospitals, universities, and other parts of the civilian infrastructure, including methodically tearing up roads.

Kovalik emphasised the significant role of the United States in this situation, stating that this war is as much or more an American war as it is an Israeli one. He criticised the port being constructed, allegedly for humanitarian purposes, which has been touted by Biden, Blinken, and others. Kovalik argued that if the United States truly wanted to ensure the people of Gaza received food, medicine, and water, they would ensure that the land routes remained open. He pointed out that the Rafah crossings have been completely closed, blocking vital aid and preventing people from leaving.

By highlighting these points, Kovalik shed light on the dire situation in Gaza, emphasising the genocidal nature of the actions against the Palestinian population and the complicity of the United States in these atrocities.



Bill Law, Editor of Arab Digest, spoke passionately about the cultural genocide occurring in Gaza, referencing a statement released by the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). Law emphasised that MESA, which involves roughly 2,700 members, 50-plus institutional members, and 36 affiliated members, has highlighted the cultural genocide being perpetrated against the Palestinian people.

Law expressed his deep concern about the destruction of Gaza's cultural and historical heritage. He praised the courageous efforts of academics and university professors supporting student protests worldwide, despite facing job losses, censure, and harassment from various quarters.

Reading from MESA's statement, Law underscored the accelerating scale of genocidal violence and the concomitant cultural genocide resulting from the destruction of Gaza's built environment and civilian infrastructure. He pointed out that this destruction extends to roads, infrastructure, and more critically, Gaza's archaeological, religious, and cultural heritage sites. Law emphasised that these actions aim to erase the notion of a Palestinian people by systematically destroying their historical memory and material claims to their homeland.

Law expressed outrage at the decimation of thousands of years of historical material culture, part of the shared world heritage, due to the Israeli military's actions. He stressed that this policy, ongoing for over a century, facilitates the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland, erasing their cultural and historical presence. Law criticised the complicity of foreign powers, particularly the United States and Britain, in this policy, noting that Palestinian voices are excluded from diplomatic discussions and decision-making processes.

Providing detailed data on the destruction in Gaza, Law cited information from the Arab Regional Group at the International Council of Monuments and Sites. He revealed that 200 of the 325 registered sites in Gaza, of national, global, historical, archaeological, natural, religious, and humanitarian importance, have been destroyed or severely damaged by the Israeli military. This includes five public libraries and archives, four university libraries, six publishing houses, 19 cultural and social centers, three media and artistic production companies, ten museums, four churches, at least 114 mosques, eight archaeological sites, seven historical houses and markets, and the coastal wetlands.



Law also highlighted the destruction of graveyards, including two cemeteries administered by the Commonwealth War Graves Committee. He noted his efforts to contact the committee for confirmation on the status of these cemeteries and the Palestinian families who have maintained them for decades, but received no response.

In his remarks, Law stressed that these actions represent a deliberate plan to eradicate the culture, history, and story of the Palestinian people, contributing to the broader context of cultural genocide. He called for greater awareness and action to preserve and protect Palestinian heritage in the face of these systematic efforts to erase it.

Dr. William A. Booth, a Latin American History Lecturer at UCL, critiqued the concept of Enlightenment imperialism and universalism, highlighting the hypocrisy in the application of Enlightenment values. He emphasised that while ideals such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, international law, and ethical investment are purportedly universal, they are selectively applied by the powerful to maintain their dominance over the less powerful.

Booth underscored the student protests as a significant demonstration of these values in action. He read from UCL's mission statement, which describes the institution as "a diverse intellectual community engaged with the wider world and committed to changing it for the better, recognized for our radical and critical thinking and its widespread influence." Booth argued that the students' actions—organising rallies, encampments, and protests against genocide—embody this mission. He noted the frustration and predictability of the university management's response, which is not unique to UCL but prevalent across the UK.

Booth highlighted the students' occupation of the Jeremy Bentham Room for 34 days, where they held numerous talks and workshops. He drew attention to the academic destruction in Gaza, with almost 8,000 students and 100 professors killed, and every university destroyed. Additionally, Booth mentioned the increased prominence of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) campaign at UCL, which had its official launch recently. He reported that 500 staff members had signed up to six pledges, including not working with complicit universities in Israel, not doing business with genocide-complicit corporations, supporting Palestinian universities and students, stopping the silencing of solidarity, ending investments in arms companies, and supporting the wider BDS campaign.



Booth emphasised that Palestinian organisations have long requested these actions, and the urgency of the current situation has brought these demands into sharper focus for many. He called for continued support and solidarity, highlighting the critical role of academic institutions and their communities in advocating for justice and human rights.

Dr. Elliott Colla, Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, emphasised the transformative power of education and highlighted the generational dimensions of campus struggles. Drawing from his own 40 years of experience in academia—as a student, graduate student, researcher, and now a tenured professor—he shed light on the culture of repression present even in the most liberal institutions in the United States.

Colla recounted his personal journey of understanding Palestine, which began during his undergraduate years at a liberal institution. Coming from a Jewish-Christian family with de facto Zionist views, he had many preconceived notions about the region. It was through the patience and generosity of Palestinian students, who shared their family histories and realities, that he gained a deeper understanding. He emphasised the significant role of Palestinian witnessing in educating others about their struggles.

Reflecting on the academic environment 40 years ago, Colla noted that American and world history curricula were dominated by foundational myths of settler colonial culture. Critical studies on topics like settler colonialism and slavery were hard to find within the main curriculum. At his university, Berkeley, such subjects were primarily available in specialized departments like African American Studies, Native American Studies, Asian American Studies, and Latino/Chicano Studies. For many students from his background, accessing these critical perspectives required significant effort, often leading them outside the university's main academic offerings.

Colla contrasted this with the present-day academic landscape, which now includes empirically based critical studies of settler colonialism, slavery, and their enduring legacies. He highlighted the shift towards understanding these issues not merely as historical events but as ongoing structures that continue to shape contemporary society.

By sharing his educational journey and the evolution of academic studies, Colla underscored the importance of critical education in fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues like settler colonialism and the Palestinian struggle. He also praised





the role of current student protests in continuing this tradition of critical engagement and activism on campus.

Asmaa Abo Baker El-Fiky, a history undergraduate at King's College London, spoke passionately about the interconnectedness and formidable nature of the student movement supporting Palestine. She shared her personal involvement in the encampments at both King's College London and UCLA, noting the significance of these protests at such renowned institutions.

El-Fiky highlighted the relevance of the ongoing genocide to King's College London, pointing out that ICC judge Karim Khan is an alumnus of the university. She recounted her experience from the encampment at King's, which was launched on May 13 in response to seven months of petitions sent to the university management. While there have been no official arrests like at Yale and UCLA, she noted a significant change in the university's student dynamic, particularly concerning the repeated use of the term "safety" by the management. El-Fiky argued that "safety" has become a euphemism for suppression, used in letters, announcements, and conversations to stifle the student movement. She criticised the university's sudden focus on fire exits, tent placements, and campus visitor convenience, pointing out that these issues were never prioritized before the encampment.

El-Fiky emphasised the clear demands of the students: for the university to disclose and divest from all corporations and manufacturers complicit in maintaining Israeli apartheid, to safeguard students both within the university and the wider academic world, and to commit to rebuilding Gaza's educational sector. She highlighted the lack of acknowledgment from King's College London regarding the murder of Dr. Maisara and Rayas, an alumnus, during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. In contrast, other deceased alumni have been honored and acknowledged by the university, raising questions about this discrepancy.

She also criticised the university's ethical investment policy, noting that while King's College London withdrew entirely from investments in fossil fuels in March 2021 as part of their mission to serve society and ensure a positive future for the university and the planet, they have not shown the same commitment to human life. El-Fiky pointed out the irony in the university's stance, suggesting that Palestinians are being denied their right to share the same planet, which is relentlessly bombed and flattened.



El-Fiky concluded by stressing the importance of communication and dialogue between students and management, highlighting the radio silence and lack of engagement from the university. She called for recognition of the students' demands and an ethical approach that truly values human life as much as environmental concerns.

Eslem Demiral, a student of climate physics at ETH Zurich and a member of the Students for Palestine group, spoke about the student protests and the repression they face. She highlighted ETH Zurich's significant role in providing technology to Israeli institutions and the Israeli military, including AI technology to companies like Google, contributing to what she described as the first AI-powered genocide. Demiral emphasised the responsibility of ETH Zurich and called for accountability and awareness regarding their collaborations.

Demiral pointed out the double standards in ETH Zurich's actions, noting that while the university sanctioned 17 institutions immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it has not sanctioned any Israeli institutions or the Israeli military. She and her group have been advocating for ETH Zurich to condemn the genocide and support an academic boycott against institutions collaborating with the Israeli military. Despite their efforts, initiatives to raise these issues have often been silenced or postponed in Switzerland.

She described the immediate and harsh repression the students faced during a recent sit-in at ETH Zurich and other Swiss universities. The police responded with unusual severity, using rubber bullets, pepper spray, and making arrests. Demiral emphasised that this response was highly unusual for Swiss police dealing with peaceful student protests and underscored the attack on their human rights.

Demiral also mentioned the systemic oppression they face when trying to raise awareness, with their credibility often attacked and their actions dismissed as being driven by external Marxist groups. She noted the collaboration with the group No Tech for Apartheid within Google, as Google Zurich is a significant location outside the US. Despite the challenges, they continue to raise awareness and advocate for their cause.

Across Switzerland, in cities like Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, and Bern, similar police repression has been observed against peaceful student protests. Demiral stressed the



importance of their efforts to raise awareness about human rights violations and the need for solidarity in addressing these issues.

Marcello Thomas, a French student from Sorbonne University, highlighted the importance of continued mobilisation against the genocide in Gaza, despite facing significant repression. He emphasised the solidarity among students across different colleges in Paris and beyond, noting the relentless repression from the government, especially in the early weeks of their protests and encampments at institutions like Sorbonne and Sciences Po.

Thomas reported that more than 80 students were detained by the police in recent weeks, demonstrating the government's efforts to crush the protests. He stressed that the ongoing mobilisation sends a clear message to the government that the students will not be silenced. The repression extended beyond universities to workplaces, where expressing dissent against the genocide in Gaza is met with severe consequences.

Despite most colleges being in exam periods and many campuses being closed, Thomas highlighted the significance of maintaining the protests. He pointed to the broader international solidarity, with similar mobilisations in the USA, London, and other parts of France. He condemned the French government's complicity in the genocide, citing the financial and military support sent to Israel. Thomas argued that facing this repression is crucial because it is deeply political and necessary to challenge the imperialist policies that sustain the Israeli government's actions.

Thomas mentioned an upcoming protest organised by students in Strasbourg, emphasising the ongoing commitment to express solidarity with Palestinians. He criticised the hypocrisy of governments that claim to denounce the violence while continuing to support Israel militarily and financially. The protests aim to send a clear message against imperialist politics and the role of Western governments in enabling the Israeli government's actions.

Thomas also drew attention to the broader context of repression, noting that protests in Egypt were initially accepted but later suppressed by the government. He stressed the importance of continuing the fight and sending a clear message of solidarity with Palestinians, countering accusations of anti-Semitism and terrorism. Thomas concluded by emphasising that their struggle is not just about opposing their own



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المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

government's actions but also about standing against colonial politics and supporting justice for Palestinians now and in the future.

**Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK**