

Professor Emma Johnston AO, Vice-Chancellor  
Disciplinary panel, Student protests  
University of Melbourne  
Via email: [vc@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:vc@unimelb.edu.au)

12 June, 2025

Dear Vice-Chancellor and Panel members,

**Regarding expulsion of two students and suspension of two students involved in protest against the University of Melbourne's affiliation with Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

We urge that these disciplinary actions be overturned.

The reason for the actions taken by the students under threat of expulsion or suspension was Israel's ongoing and deliberate destruction of healthcare and practically all other aspects of civil society in Gaza, and the continuing mass killing and maiming of Palestinians. The University of Melbourne's partnership with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, formalised through memoranda of understanding and joint research programs, helps legitimise Israel's actions and is a legitimate focus of student concern.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has found that Palestinians in Gaza face a plausible risk of genocide and has ordered the Israeli government to take all measures within its power to prevent genocidal acts. The ICJ ruling also places an obligation on all states and all institutions not to act in ways that support or legitimise wrongful acts such as unlawful occupation, apartheid, war crimes or human rights violations. (We note with reference to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, that the Mount Scopus campus is located in an area internationally recognised as occupied territory.)

This week the UN-mandated Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel has reported its finding that the Israeli military's destruction of educational and cultural infrastructure in Gaza amounts to war crimes and the crime against humanity of extermination.<sup>1</sup>

Outside of Gaza, Israel's longstanding suppression of Palestinian academic freedom<sup>2</sup>, in contravention of numerous international laws and covenants, is reported to have increased since October 2023, with an "unprecedented number"<sup>3</sup> of suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary actions against Palestinian

<sup>1</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164191>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2023/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/10922>

students by Israeli institutions, including the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Academic staff - including the Lawrence D. Biele Chair in Law at the Faculty of Law-Institute of Criminology and the School of Social Work and Public Welfare at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian - have also reported serious harassment.<sup>4</sup>

The legal and moral case for all states, all institutions, and all individuals to act in defence of universal rights and to uphold their obligations in relation to Palestine, could not be clearer. University of Melbourne leadership has willfully ignored these imperatives, focussing instead on limiting and punishing campus activism.

In addition, the concerns of the students who have protested against Israel's actions are entirely in keeping with the University's stated vision of education as equipping individuals to create "a more just, fair, and inclusive community" - words they have put into action. Their desire for justice and fairness should be acknowledged, not severely punished.

Seeking to silence diverse perspectives by accusing students who are peacefully protesting of being a threat to safety damages the principles of free speech on campus. We are not aware of any evidence that the protest activities in question jeopardised anyone's safety.

The fundamental human right of peaceful assembly and association is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UN Human Rights Committee outlines the rights to peaceful assembly. Inconvenient and confronting student protests have been central to meaningful change on many issues, and have changed our society - and our universities - for the better.

Expulsion and suspension are extreme disciplinary measures, and should be reserved for the most serious breaches of conduct. We urge the panel to drop these measures.

We further request that the University review and report on the steps it will take to uphold its legal and moral obligations not to support or legitimise occupation, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or breaches of international covenants, humanitarian law and international human rights law, including in relation to its arrangements with Israeli academic institutions.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sue Wareham OAM  
**President, MAPW**

A/Prof Tilman Ruff AO MB,BS (Hons), FRACP  
Hon Principal Fellow, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne  
**International Councillor, MAPW**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pen-international.org/cases/nadera-shalhoub-kevorkian>

Prof Rob Moodie AM MB,BS (UniMelb) MPH FAPHM FRACGP DTMH  
Professor of Global Health, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne  
**National Councillor, MAPW**

Blessy Fernandez  
**Health Students Association for the Prevention of War**