

# GWSS Faculty Statement on Palestine

October 16, 2023

**Gender Women and Sexuality Studies Faculty Statement on Palestine**  
**University of Minnesota**  
**October 13, 2023**

Amended November 20: This statement was written collectively by the tenured core faculty of the Department of Gender Women and Sexuality Studies. This statement does not reflect the position of the University of Minnesota. It is consistent with our right to exercise academic freedom and the principles and commitments reflected in other statements written by national and international organizations pertaining to our academic field; for example, the National Women's Studies Association call for an end to the war on Gaza, American Studies Association's statement on Gaza, and the Palestine Statement of the International Critical Geographies Group.

In the last week, violence has dramatically escalated in Palestine. After Hamas fighters brought down border fences and launched an incursion into Israeli territory, Israel responded by declaring total war on Gaza. On October 12, 1.1 million Gazans were given 24 hours to "evacuate", despite all checkpoints being closed and documented bombings of evacuees.

We mourn for the many lives lost. We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, and with Palestinian scholars and organizers. At a time when so many institutions are renewing a commitment to Israel's right to "self defense", we assert that Israel's response is not self-defense but the continuation of a genocidal war against Gaza and against Palestinian freedom, self-determination, and life.

To understand what is happening, we must look to history, and we must study. For the last sixteen years, Israel has illegally besieged 2 million people in Gaza. Gazans' access to power, water, and food are controlled by Israel and have been systematically cut off. Multiple military attacks by the Israeli state have destroyed Gaza's infrastructure; during these attacks, Israel bombs hospitals, schools, mosques, and apartment blocks where civilians live, claiming that Hamas is using civilians as human shields. Israel continues to expand illegal settlements in the West Bank and to stand by while settlers commit terrifying attacks on Palestinian residents. We strongly reject the media coverage that condemns "both sides", or seeks to tell a one-sided story of an unprovoked terrorist attack. Israeli leaders are wielding a violent power that subjugates the Palestinian people and constructs them as dehumanized terrorists, upon whom any bloodshed can be meted out. Meanwhile, global media

coverage reproduces Islamophobic tropes of terrorism and unsubstantiated claims of “uncivilized” violence. In the process, politicians and the media are legitimizing the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. This is an obscene, immoral, and cowardly act.

The U.S. administration remains silent in the face of this ongoing massacre, refusing to recognize Israel’s persistent violations of international laws and human rights obligations. Israel has never been held to the same legal and human rights commitments that the U.S. demands from states to which it provides military and monetary support. As the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, Israel had accumulated \$263 billion of assistance since 1949. In 2023, the U.S. government gave Israel \$3.8 billion in military aid, not including the resources President Biden promised Israel this week. This is a continuation of the settler colonialism and exceptionalism upon which the United States nation-state is founded and which has provided legitimacy to a host of U.S. imperial wars or proxy wars: in Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, Nicaragua, Panama, Vietnam, Laos, Korea, the Philippines, and many other places.

In the past decades, all forms of Palestinian resistance and solidarity with Palestine have been further criminalized or violently repressed, from the global boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) to the Great March of Return in 2018, during which peaceful protesters were fired on by Israeli soldiers. We stand against antisemitism. Objecting to the Israeli state’s settler colonial violence, however, is not antisemitic, and the conflation of support for Palestinian resistance with antisemitism is itself a violent oppressive form of censorship and an insult to our academic and moral integrity. We echo the South African anti-apartheid leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Palestinian civil society who have rightly pointed out that, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

Our department has a rich history of studying transnational geopolitics and settler colonialism. We stand in solidarity with other scholars and centers facing the curtailing of academic freedom to speak on this issue, and to study it closely. Along with the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Department at U.C. Santa Cruz, we condemn the harassment against organizers from the Institute for the Critical Study of Zionism (ICSZ). Along with the National Women’s Studies Association, we reaffirm support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement, and we call on students, colleagues, and friends around the country to call for lifting the siege, ending the occupation, and dismantling Israel’s apartheid system.

As members of a land grab university that resides on the unceded land Mni Sota Makoce of the Dakota people, we are painfully aware of our complicity with the settler colonial violence against Indigenous people and the continuing dispossession of their land on Turtle Island. We are equally complicit with the global imperialism that engenders the maiming and killing of the Palestinian people by the U.S.-backed Israeli state. We insist on our ethical and political responsibility to raise our voices against settler colonialism, and the U.S. government’s enabling military and monetary support of the apartheid state of Israel.

Writing from the site of the murders of Jamar Clark, Philando Castile, Isak Aden, Dolal Idd, Jamar Clark, George Floyd, and Daunte Wright, we reaffirm our commitment to anti-colonialism, abolition, and the dismantlement of militarized state violence across the world. Like many U.S.-based universities, the University of Minnesota has investments in companies that do business in illegal Israeli settlements

in Palestine. We ask our university to divest from Israel, and support the call by Palestinian civil society for BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions). As we observe students and academic workers around the country being singled out and harassed for speaking out on Palestine, we call on the University of Minnesota to reaffirm a commitment to academic freedom, and to protect all in the university community who speak out against Israeli and U.S. violence.

As scholars and solidarity workers who seek justice everywhere, we respond to the call of Palestinian feminists and Palestinian freedom fighters for transnational solidarity and assert that Palestine is a feminist issue. None of us will be free unless the Palestinian people are free and Palestinian land is liberated.

"It is our duty then to write down the events that took place, as they took place, and to note them as they are before time weaves its strings of forgetfulness around them."—Palestinian journalist Arif Al-'Arif, writing on the Nakba in 1948

This statement reflects our individual views and we do not purport to speak for the University.

### **Solidarity and Educational Resources**

[Al-Madinah Student Cultural Center](#)

[UMN Students for Justice in Palestine](#)

[Jewish Voice for Peace](#)

[Palestine Legal](#)

[Teaching Palestine resources from the University of Illinois Chicago Critical Asian Studies](#)

[Al Jazeera: Middle East-based news network](#)

[Jadaliyya: an independent ezine produced by the Arab Studies Institute](#)

[Gabriel Winant, "On Mourning and Statehood: A Response To Joshua Leifer," Dissent magazine October 12 2023.](#)

[Noura Erakat on Democracy Now, October 13 2023](#)

\* This statement was adapted from a [joint statement written by AGITATE! Journal collective members, the Imagining Transnational Solidarities Research Circle \(ITSRC\), and Gender Women and Sexuality Studies faculty in 2021](#). We are grateful for the solidarity of our colleagues.

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