

SUCU Emergency General Meeting Agenda 10th November 2023, 1pm - 2pm

Google Meet - online only

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Single issue agenda: Palestine
3. Motions
 - Motion 1: Motion to End the Violence in Palestine, Support Palestinian Rights, Protect Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression and Oppose all Racism (Appendix 1)
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SUCU Extraordinary General Meeting Minutes 10th November 2023, 1pm - 2pm

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Chair: Robyn Orfitelli (RO), Minutes: Rosie Strathearn-Brady (RSB)

1. Welcome and introductions

RO welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Single issue agenda: Palestine

This is a single item agenda in response to the conflict in Palestine, and to determine how our branch should respond to it. Discussion began with the introduction of Motion 1.

3. Motions

3.1 - Motion 1: Motion to End the Violence in Palestine, Support Palestinian Rights, Protect Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression and Oppose all Racism (Appendix 1)

This motion was moved and seconded by members from the floor.

Motion passed - 51 in favour, 1 abstention, 0 against

Discussion included the following topics:

- It is vital that we oppose racism, including anti-semitism and islamophobia.
- A member noted the recent Amnesty statement calling for the release of Israeli civilians and asked whether this could be incorporated into the motion. One of the authors of the motion noted that the definition of 'hostage' can be complex in the context of this conflict as there are many political prisoners held in Israel who might be defined as hostages. The Chair explained the procedural difficulties of amending from the floor and the motion remained as written. This is the link to the [Amnesty statement](#).
- As part of the international trade union response, every action makes a difference.
- The UCU has supported a Palestinian academic at Sheffield Hallam.
- Should we focus on holding our own government to account, rather than directing the Israeli and Palestinian governments?

3.2 - Motion 2: UKRI Motion (Appendix 2)

This motion was moved by a member of the Committee, on behalf of the Committee. It was seconded by a member from the floor.

Motion passed - 50 in favour, 1 abstention, 0 against

Discussion included the following topics:

- We should stand in solidarity with the wider UCU.
- We have a responsibility to respond.

Question from the floor: What are the implications for Professional Services members who are supporting UKRI applications?

Answer: The motion calls for staff to step back from voluntary roles, not paid positions. There is no call to step back from tasks that are a mandatory part of your everyday work. If you are unsure where a role or task sits then you can contact the committee to discuss it further.

4. Any other business

4.1 - Committee: A motion regarding 'Arms off Campus and Genocide Complicity' was submitted too late for this meeting but will be presented at next week's GM.

4.2 - Committee: We have a [Palestine Teach-In](#) on Tuesday 14 November, 6pm-8pm - please share and sign up

4.3 - Suggestion from the floor: [A student walk-out](#) is planned for next week. A discussion was held about how we can support it and what the legal implications may be. There is the possibility of supporting with a symbolic walk-out at lunchtime. No decision was made as further discussion is needed.

4.4 - Committee: The University has provided little written information on the conflict. Following a conversation with the Committee, they have tentatively agreed to consider using the Jerusalem Declaration rather than the IHRA definition that they currently subscribe to. The AMRC (Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre) at the University of Sheffield are partnered with BAE Systems who provide arms to Israel. We should take action to challenge this. These two links may be of interest: [Who Arms Israel](#) and [BDS](#).

4.5 - Suggestion from the floor: We should link up with local groups.

4.6 - Question from the floor: What support will the union provide to staff if they are targeted for their work towards ending the violence in Palestine? A member asked for an update on a letter that had been drafted to heads of departments regarding protecting free speech.

Answer:

- The Committee has been working with campus security to ensure that the Teach-In will be as physically safe as possible.
- Some conversations on freedom of speech with management have already begun.
- If anyone feels like they are being targeted or has any concerns then they should contact the union for casework support.
- The member and the committee will discuss the suggested letter outside of the meeting to consider the best way of finalising and circulating this.

5. Summary and actions

Action	Who?
Affiliate with the Sheffield Coalition against Israeli Apartheid	Committee
Comms calling for a ceasefire and declaring support for BDS	Committee
Donate £1000 to the humanitarian organisation Medical Aid for Palestinians	Committee
Create a working group in response to the UCU arms manufacturers motion	Committee and members
Call on the VC to take action (see Motion 1 for more detail)	Committee
Motion 1 to be sent to members of the NEC and the General Secretary	Committee
Send out communications to advise members to take specific action regarding the UKRI (see Motion 2 for more detail).	Committee
Call upon UoS to express concerns to UKRI	Committee
Action plan to be created and worked upon	Committee & Members
Approach and link up with local groups	Committee and members
Provide information on what support is available to members from the UCU	Committee
Support and share communications	Members
Share and sign up to the Teach-In	Members
Further discussion about how we will support next week's Student Walkout	Committee and Members
Share ideas on future actions and start work on them	Committee & Members

APPENDIX 1: Motion 1 - Motion to End the Violence in Palestine, Support Palestinian Rights, Protect Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression and Oppose all Racism

Sheffield UCU notes:

1. **The recent upsurge in appalling violence in Israel-Palestine has claimed around 1400 Israeli lives and over [10,000](#) Palestinian lives (at the time of writing); and is causing the on-going displacement of more than half a million people in the Gaza Strip;**
2. The Nakba, the violent dispossession of Palestinian people from their land by Israel, has been ongoing since 1948. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank have been living under Israeli military occupation since 1967, whilst Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been living under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007;
3. [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#), [B'Tselem](#), [Al-Haq](#) and the past four out of five UN Special Rapporteurs on the state of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have stated that Palestinians are living under a regime of apartheid;
4. The UK government is complicit in the dispossession of Palestinians and has actively endorsed and materially supported this ongoing regime of apartheid and the current war crimes and crimes against humanity being carried out by Israel against the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territory;
5. The colonial, racist and genocidal narratives articulated by Israeli state officials to systematically dehumanise Palestinians, including categorising Palestinians as [barbarians](#), [animals](#) and terrorists; and the uncritical adoption of such narratives, discourses and categories in UK public life.
6. The UK's complicity has also entailed increasingly aggressive attempts to censor people demanding an end to Palestinian oppression, including those at UK universities whose experiences have recently been highlighted by the British Society for Middle East Studies ([BRISMES](#)) and UCU national.
7. Increases in racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, in the UK and beyond.

Sheffield UCU believes that:

1. The targeting of civilians by any party should be condemned as a war crime;
2. Israel's cutting off of the entry of supplies to Gaza, which has left civilians without food, water, electricity, and medical aid; its targeting of civilians, hospitals, schools, border crossings and other civilian infrastructure; and its attempts to forcibly transfer the population from the north of Gaza, [may amount to genocide](#);
3. Israeli occupation and apartheid must end and the internationally-recognised rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination must be realised;
4. It is unacceptable to equate all Jewish people with the Israeli state, and it is unacceptable to equate all Palestinians and Arabs with Hamas. Members should be able to express support for Palestinians and Palestine as well as Israelis and Israel, and everyone must be free to criticise governments around the world. In this case in particular, it is important that people are able to criticise the Israeli government without accusations of antisemitism;
5. Trade unions can play a role - and are being [urged by Palestinian trade unions](#) - to pressure the UK government to end its complicity in the on-going occupation of

Palestine, the expansion of settlement construction and the war crimes committed against the Palestinian people;

6. UK universities, including the University of Sheffield, must not be complicit with war crimes and crimes against humanity and, [as upheld in a SUCU branch motion on 8 June 2021](#), must immediately end all ties with entities involved in the perpetration of grave violations of human rights, including developing weaponry, military doctrines and legal justifications for the mass targeting of Palestinians.

Sheffield UCU resolves to:

1. Demand that the UK government call for an immediate ceasefire, most urgently an end to the military offensive by the Israeli state on Gaza, and call for the UK government to stop selling weapons to Israel
2. Donate £1000 to the humanitarian organisation [Medical Aid for Palestinians](#);
3. Affiliate with the Sheffield Coalition against Israeli Apartheid
4. Actively support efforts to build local and national solidarity with Palestine, including, but not limited to, teach-outs, walk-outs, petitions, protests, support in promoting such events, allowing the use of the Sheffield UCU banner, and the sending of solidarity messages and delegates from the Branch;
5. Reiterate branch support for the campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel, including the Palestinian Academic Campaign for the Cultural and Academic Boycott of Israel; and develop a plan of concrete actions, including pledging to support and defend the right of members to refuse any work connected to the Israeli state or military;
6. Urgently create a working group to take forward the [motion](#) "Ending University Partnerships with Arms Manufacturers", passed at the Sheffield UCU Annual General Meeting, 25 February 2023, in response to the Palestinian trade unions' call to end military support for and trade with Israel;
7. Call on the VC to publicly affirm Sheffield University's commitment to protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech with regards to expressions of solidarity with Palestinians, to offer identical support and freedom of speech guarantees to Palestinian students, staff and advocates as was offered to the people and supporters of Ukraine when they were made victims of imperial aggression, and to urge other Universities UK to do the same;
8. Call on the VC to respond to the Secretary of State for Education's letter (dated 11 October 2023), pushing back on the dangerous implications of the letter in expanding the hostile environment on university campuses, stifling the protected right to free speech, and undermining universities' duty of care to all students and staff;
9. Provide support to staff and students censored, harassed, and/or disciplined for expressing support for Palestinian rights;
10. Affirm national UCU's [call](#) for members to withdraw from all voluntary positions with UKRI until such time as UKRI reverses its suspension of its EDI panel;
11. Oppose all forms of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia;
12. Send this motion to members of the NEC and to the General Secretary.

APPENDIX 2: Motion 2 - UKRI Motion

This branch notes;

1. The ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine has caused thousands of civilian deaths, and is creating a wider humanitarian crisis that has attracted condemnation from around the world, including criticisms of the Israeli Defence Force's strategies and targeting decisions, and calls for a humanitarian cease-fire.
2. There is a current wave of repression and censorship against those expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people and their cause, both within and outside the UK.
3. On 28th October Michelle Donelan, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, wrote a public letter to UKRI which singled out and named two academic members of the EDI Advisory Group for their social media posts responding to the situation in Gaza, and questioned the role of the Advisory Group.
4. UKRI responded with a letter to Donelan, dated 30th October, in which they announced the suspension of the EDI group, an investigation into Donelan's claims, and a review of the future of both the EDI group and all other advisory structures within UKRI.
5. UCU contacted UKRI expressing strong reservations to this suspension, and initiating a campaign for members to withdraw from national UKRI roles.

This branch believes;

1. Michelle Donelan's letter represents a direct attempt from a member of the current government to silence academics speaking out on Palestine.
2. The capitulation to political threats from a government minister raises ethical questions about the independence of research and knowledge within UK HE.
3. The letter, and UKRI's response, undermines and threatens academic freedom and freedom of speech more generally.

This branch resolves;

1. To advise that members in voluntary roles with UKRI resign from their posts and not accept future invitations to participate.
2. To advise that members boycott events organised by UKRI, and refuse to conduct peer reviews from UKRI grant applications.
3. To advise that members not participate in UKRI related voluntary activities here at the University of Sheffield.
4. To encourage members in professional associations to express their concern collectively to UKRI.
5. To call upon the University of Sheffield to express concerns to UKRI regarding its response to Donelan's intervention and to speak out to reaffirm academic freedom of speech in this context.