

The Destruction of Education in Gaza and Reconstruction Support

Introduction

The Israeli military's attacks on Gaza, which began in October 2023, have brought rare and serious consequences for the Palestinians of Gaza, as shown by South Africa's filing of a "genocide" lawsuit at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December of the same year. Genocide deprives people of their right to live in various ways. One of its major aspects is the destruction of education.

The Israeli military has taken many lives and destroyed the medical institutions and industrial infrastructure that supported those lives. What is important is that educational facilities have been completely destroyed, and many teachers, staff, and students have been killed. This educational genocide is called as "scholasticide" or "educide" (for the definition of the former, see [1]). As responsible members of the international community, we, especially those involved in education, have a duty to demand an immediate end to this educational genocide, and at the same time, to make efforts to restore education.

Destruction of educational facilities and interruption of academic studies

According to a report by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (April 2025), as of April 2025, 95.5% of schools in Gaza had suffered various levels of damage from Israeli military attacks. 88.5% of school buildings require complete reconstruction or major renovation. 241 public schools were severely damaged, of which 111 were completely destroyed. In addition to the destruction, many schools were converted into military facilities, such as military bases and detention facilities. The damage to universities is shown in the report [2].

Also, 13 public libraries, 195 historical sites, 227 mosques, 3 churches, and the 150-year-old Central Archives of Gaza were also destroyed. Not only educational facilities but also cultural infrastructure suffered damage that is difficult to repair.

In addition to the systematic destruction of educational facilities, the ongoing bombings, the repeated forced evacuations, and the disruption of electricity and internet, students are also tasked with securing food, water, and fuel for cooking for their families, forcing them to endure a prolonged interruption to their studies (a year and a half between October 2023 and June 2025 alone). This will have serious consequences for the school-age population in the future (for more on this, see [3]).

Cast and Injury of Students and Faculty

As of October 27, 2023, there were more than 625,000 students and more than 22,500 teachers in Gaza. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, between October 7, 2023 and April 15, 2025, 13,419 students were killed and 21,653 were injured. Of the teaching staff, 651 teachers were killed and 2,791 were injured. These are the figures that have been confirmed. The

number of students and faculty who were detained is unknown, but is estimated to be in the hundreds [3].

As for university-related casualties, as some of them are shown in the reports [4], many university faculty members were reported to have been killed. Of the 12 major universities, the presidents of three universities were killed. At least 95 professors, including deans (68 of whom held the title of full professor), were killed. As one example, Professor Sufyan Tayef, president of the Gaza Islamic University, was killed along with his family in an airstrike on December 4, 2023. He was a physics expert who was among the 2% of the world's best scientists selected by Stanford University in 2021.

The professors targeted had a wide range of specialties, but all of them were central researchers in academic research in Gaza. This can also be seen as a “cultural genocide” carried out in parallel as a deliberate killing of cultural figures, including poets, artists, prominent activists and journalists in particular.

This destruction, as the definition of scholasticide indicates, was part and parcel of the genocidal effort to impede the reproduction of the social order in that occupied territory, and as “part of a broader effort to render it uninhabitable, hence paving the way for its comprehensive ethnic cleansing [1].”

Motives to the educational genocide

Why did the Israeli army carry out such a thorough destruction of education this time? The motives to this educational genocide is the high level of education of the Palestinians under occupation. According to the Palestinian Statistics Bureau, the literacy rate (for those aged 15 and over) in the West Bank and Gaza is extremely high at 97.8% in 2022. Due to improvements in the school education system in Gaza in recent years, the illiteracy rate has also decreased significantly.

The same is true for Palestinians living outside Palestine, such as in Lebanon, but what is distinctive about Palestinians compared to neighboring Arab countries is that there is almost no difference in literacy and school enrollment rates between men and women. What is astonishing is that this high level of interest in school education has been maintained despite hard-core unemployment and poverty. It can be safe to say, as some have pointed out, that the Israeli side may have felt threatened by this high level of educational aspiration itself [5].

Condemning educational genocide and supporting Palestinian resilience to restore education

One well-known movement against Israel's destruction of Palestinian education is the anti-scholasticide movement “Scholars Against the War on Palestine (SAWP)” by Western scholars. Its main members include Professor Karma Nabrusi, who proposed the concept of “scholasticide,” and Professor Judith Butler, a prominent feminist thinker. Meanwhile, Israeli academia has remained silent about the destruction of education in Gaza (<https://scholarsagainstawar.org/>).

Gaza's educational facilities are now in an extreme state, having been completely destroyed.

Although there is currently no prospect of a complete ceasefire, the reconstruction of education in Gaza is an obligation of the international community. In particular, those involved in universities need to take this on as their own responsibility. As mentioned before, Palestinians have a traditional tendency to prioritize the education of the younger generation, no matter what the situation, in other words, they have the power of educational resilience. To support this, new measures must be developed in both the infrastructure and human resources aspects.

Some have already begun to discuss the rebuilding of educational infrastructure, such as schools [6]. This is a mid- to long-term reconstruction plan that will require huge investments. However, considering the long interruption from education that students have been facing, it is the rebuilding of education from a human perspective that must be addressed as soon as possible. Even if educational infrastructure is destroyed and educators are killed, people's lives and their futures must be saved and secured first and foremost.

Of course, it will take many years and need investment to train a new generation of educators for rebuilding education. Now that many outstanding researchers and educators have been lost, as shown in the reports [4], we need not only the efforts, motivation, and resilience of young people to regain them, but also the creation of an international framework to support them.

In rebuilding education, the importance of primary and secondary education, which are the foundation of the entire system, goes without saying. However, what I would like to appeal here to those involved in universities is the significant meaning that the rebuilding of university education has for the development of education as a whole.

What we can do to help rebuild education in Gaza

Methods of reconstruction support

- Indirect measures:

E-learning, etc. by using universities and educational facilities outside the Gaza Strip: the West Bank, neighboring Arab countries, Japan and other Asian countries, etc.

- Direct measures:

- 1)Accepting students for short-term periods at universities in neighboring countries
- 2)Supporting students studying in neighboring countries: Egypt and others and Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia et al.

(Related Information)

The precedent case of accepting Syrian refugee students in Japan (see [7])

It is also possible to implement the plan within the framework of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), which the Japanese government launched in 2013 (https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/me_a/me1/page22_003015.html).

Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST) and JICA agree to implement scholarship program for Palestine (October 3, 2024)

(https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/1800270/news/1553356_44953.html)

Conditions for short-term training and study abroad

- International guarantees and support from neighboring countries and Asian countries
- Protection of students by neighboring countries, especially the Egyptian government, regarding travel from Gaza
- Guarantee of the right of return to Gaza for trainees and international students
- Elimination of international interference with students studying abroad or returning their home to Gaza
- Creation of a system at the local level in each country to support the acceptance of Palestinian international students

[NOTES]

[1] Definition of Scholasticide

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgglefindmkaj/https://scholarsagainstawar.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Scholasticide-Definition.pdf

[2] Known Status of Universities in Gaza as of January 2024

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/explainer-gaza-israel-palestine-war-university-destroy>

“Which universities in Gaza has Israel destroyed?”

Middle East Eyes, 15 May 2024

<https://thenational.shorthandstories.com/israel-gaza-war-palestine-universities/>

“The War on Education: How Israel’s destruction of schools and universities will set Gaza back decades” *The National*, By Nagham Mohanna and Nada AlTaher

[3] <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/scholasticide-continues-israels-ongoing-destruction-gazas-education-system-jeopardizes-entire-generations-future-enar>

[4] **An Incomplete List of the Academics or Higher Education Staff Killed during Israel’s War on Gaza** <https://thenational.shorthandstories.com/israel-gaza-war-palestine-universities/>

“The War on Education: How Israel’s destruction of schools and universities will set Gaza back decades” by Nagham Mohanna and Nada AlTaher

<https://gufsjp.org/fact-sheet-scholars-killed/>

Georgetown Faculty & Staff for Justice in Palestine: Fact Sheet: Scholars Killed

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgglefindmkaj/https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/List-of-Scientists_Academics-Killed-by-IOF-since-Oct-7th-Research.pdf

Victims of educational staff

https://gazaeducationsector.palestine-studies.org/en/educational_team

Over 100 Academics Killed In Gaza War: Posted on May 20, 2024

<https://aurdip.org/en/over-100-academics-killed-in-gaza-war/>

[5] <https://thenational.shorthandstories.com/israel-gaza-war-palestine-universities/>

[6] For example, in response to the Gaza reconstruction plan announced by U.S. President Trump in February 2025 (which involves the construction of a smart city with the assumption of evicting residents), the Egyptian government announced a counterproposal in March of the same year. According to the report, the material damage caused by the Israeli military attacks is estimated at US\$29.9 billion, and the economic and social damage at US\$19.1 billion (a total of US\$49 billion). It is estimated that US\$53 billion will be needed for reconstruction, of which US\$4.1 billion will be allocated to education. (<https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/541424.aspx>)

[7] Japan's support program for Syrian refugees studying abroad

Japan's support program for Syrian refugees studying abroad was launched following a statement by the Japanese government at the Ise-Shima Summit in May 2016. The following is stated in "Japan's main contributions to the G7 Ise-Shima Summit":

"The SDGs Promotion Headquarters was launched on May 20th and the following contribution measures were announced. 1. Cooperation for stabilization of the Middle East: In order to address the root causes of the issues in the Middle East, including refugees, we will not only provide humanitarian assistance from a short-term perspective, but also development assistance for social stabilization and inclusive growth, such as human resource development, making use of Japan's strengths, from a medium- to long-term perspective. Over the next three years (2016-2018), we will provide assistance totaling approximately \$6 billion, including human resource development for approximately 20,000 people. In addition, we will dispatch a humanitarian assistance team (tentative name) of JICA experts to refugee camps and increase the number of Syrian students accepted. (The rest is omitted.)" (<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000158289.pdf>).

Based on this statement, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) launched **the JICA Syria Bridge to Peace Human Resource Development Program** (JISR Program) in fiscal year 2017. According to the explanation on its website, the program "provides educational opportunities for Syrian youth who have been deprived of the opportunity to attend school due to the Syrian crisis," and "within the framework of technical cooperation, Syrian youth who have fled to Jordan and Lebanon as refugees will be accepted into Japan as exchange students from 2017."

In addition, "This is the first time that JICA has accepted refugees as international students, and we are implementing this project with the cooperation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has expertise in refugee support." Over the eight years from 2017 to 2024, 73 international students have been accepted. Most of them have found employment after graduation,

and an alumni organization will be established in 2023.

(<https://www.jica.go.jp/overseas/syria/others/jisr/index.html>)

Meanwhile, ahead of this government initiative, the private organization **Japan Association for Refugees (JAR)** began supporting Syrian refugees who had fled to Turkey to study abroad in late March 2017 (<https://www.refugee.or.jp/jar/syria/>).

The conditions for this support were that Japanese language schools would accept them free of charge and that they would have to support themselves through part-time work. In supporting the international students, **the OV Association**, a volunteer organization made up of people with experience working in cooperation projects in Syria, has been working hard to support their studies and promote interaction with the host society.

In 2021, with the support of **the Watanabe Toshizo International Scholarship, Pathways Japan (PJ)** was established as an independent organization from JAR, and expanded its business to support refugee students from Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine in addition to Syria, with the total number of students supporting them reaching approximately 200 since 2017 (<https://pathways-j.org/archives/9365>).

The website explains its achievements and significance as follows:

“Of the 205 people (including accompanying family members) who have been accepted into Japan so far, 113 have graduated from the program, 34 of whom have continued on to higher education, and of the 55 who wanted to work in Japan, approximately 76% have found employment or are working as freelancers. For Japanese society, which is currently facing a shortage of human resources, refugees and displaced people have overcome various difficulties and bring with them diverse experiences and skills, providing an opportunity to encounter new human resources.”

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