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OPINION ON COOPERATION WITH TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

Partnerships advisory committee, RU

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Summary

Based on a number of legal documents and other national and inter-national rulings by advisory councils and human rights organisations, it concludes that the State of Israel and its defence and security apparatus are guilty of serious and systematic human rights violations, both in Gaza and in the occupied Palestinian territories. It is further found that Tel Aviv University directly and specifically contributes to these serious and systematic human rights violations and potentially violates scientific integrity. The committee therefore recommends that cooperation with Tel Aviv University be subject to a number of conditions, and until such time as these conditions are honoured, the cooperation should be suspended.

1. Introduction

Partly as a result of the recent developments in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the Executive Board of Radboud University has set up an independent Advisory Committee on Partnerships (hereafter: Advisory Committee) established. This Advisory Committee is tasked with examining and weighing Radboud University's institutional partnerships, with a particular focus on partner institutions in conflict areas. To assess these partnerships, the Advisory Committee developed an Assessment Framework. It was commissioned by the Executive Board to focus primarily on institution-wide partnerships with partner institutions in conflict areas during the development of the Assessment Framework and the drafting of the recommendations. Individual partnerships are therefore not covered by this opinion.

2. Procedure

The advisory committee has met weekly since October 2024. In developing the Assessment Framework and the opinions, it researched a variety of sources and consulted (inter)national experts and experts in the fields of human rights, scientific integrity and academic freedom. It has taken note of several papers on the situation in Israel published recently, including the UN International Court of Justice rulings and opinions, the Advisory Council on International Affairs' advice to the foreign minister (23 October 2024) and Amnesty International's report. She also consulted with colleagues at home and abroad and drew on the research work done at other universities.

Within the university, the Advisory Committee requested information from the services Academic Affairs and Information & Library Services (ILS). It also consulted internal experts and listened to the views and arguments of representatives of different perspectives regarding the situation in Israel. Furthermore, it made grateful use of the proceeds from the university's

organised participation process, both directly during the various meetings and indirectly through the reporting on the meetings.¹

The Assessment Framework was used in preparing this opinion. In this advisory committee answers the questions regarding the cooperation partner as they are posed in the 'procedure' section, phase 1, of the Assessment Framework (p. 12). The answers to the questions and the various arguments have been carefully considered. Based on the answers to these questions, an outcome was determined in accordance with phase 2 from the Assessment Framework (p. 13). This document covers phase 3 of the Assessment Framework (p. 13), and offers a summary of the deliberations and a concrete recommendation.

This opinion is based on information available to the Advisory Committee to date. The situation in Israel, and in particular the relationship between Israeli universities and the Israeli government, is complex, not black and white and does change. The Advisory Committee sought to base its deliberations on information insofar as it is verifiable, complete, unambiguous and endorsed by (inter)nationally accredited bodies.

3. Radboud University partnership with Tel Aviv University

This opinion concerns the cooperation agreement between Radboud University, Nijmegen and Tel Aviv University, Israel. This cooperation agreement consists of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), drafted on 29 June 2016 and renewed on 8 December 2020. This Memorandum has an expiry date of 7 December 2025. The International Student Exchange Agreement (ISEA) pending under it was drafted on 8 December 2020 and has an expiry date of 1 January 2025, which effectively means that the ISEA should also be renewed again in December 2025. Due to the entry ban, there are currently no students from Radboud University to Tel Aviv University, and there are no Exchange Students from Tel Aviv University in Nijmegen.

4. Analysis of the human rights situation. Are there serious and systematic human rights violations by state authorities of the state of Israel?

The Assessment Framework established that in research and education cooperation with partners in war or conflict areas, the question may arise to what extent possible human rights violations may constitute an obstacle to entering into or maintaining cooperative relationships with these partners. A problematic cooperation may be with a partner institution that directly and specifically contributes to serious and systemic human rights violations by the government in the partner institution's country.

In applying the Assessment Framework to Radboud University's cooperation with Tel Aviv University in Israel, the first question to be answered is whether the government in Israel, including the Israeli armed forces (Israel Defense Forces: IDF) and affiliated (security) services, are guilty, respectively, of serious and systematic human rights violations. The answer to this question has been given in court rulings and judicial opinions, namely by the Hague Court of Appeal and the UN International Court of Justice in The Hague.

¹ See: [defversie_pm_analysis-participation-meetings-collaborations_40225_0.pdf](#). All internet sources in this document were consulted in March 2025.

These independent and impartial courts, in their fact-finding in dealing with the relevant dispute in law, have established whether, and if so to what extent, serious and systematic human rights violations have taken place in Israel by the armed forces and other state services.

4.1 Hague Court of Appeal ruling on the export and transit of weapons components of the F-35 fighter jet to Israel

At issue in this lawsuit is the distribution of parts for the F-35 fighter jet to Israel from a Defence Ministry distribution centre in Woensdrecht. This distribution of military goods requires an export licence.

On 7 October 2023, as we know, Hamas carried out an attack on Israel, in which many Israeli civilians were killed, injured and kidnapped. Israel responded to this attack by launching large-scale attacks in the Gaza Strip, the base from which Hamas operates. In these proceedings against the Dutch State, Oxfam Novib et al take the position that Israel is violating the humanitarian law of war through its attacks in the Gaza Strip. According to Oxfam Novib et al, civilian casualties in Gaza are disproportionately high, because Israel also attacks civilian targets and furthermore fails to take into account the impact on the civilian population in its attacks. Oxfam Novib et al claim that the court should order the State to ensure that the export of F-35 parts from the Netherlands to Israel stops.

At first instance, the District Court of The Hague dismissed the claims of Oxfam novib. et al. The court considered that the considerations made by the minister were largely of a political and (other) policy nature.² The court must allow the minister a wide degree of freedom in this. The Hague Court of Appeal set aside the judgment on appeal. The court concludes that the State of the Netherlands is acting unlawfully by not preventing the export and transit of F-35 parts to Israel. The court orders the State to stop supplying weapons components for the F-35 to Israel.³

In the judgment, the court concluded on the basis of an extensive fact-finding process that there was a clear risk of serious violations of international humanitarian law. In this regard, the court considered, inter alia:

'The facts show that large numbers of civilians have been victimised, including thousands of children, that thousands of residential houses have been destroyed, that dumb bombs are used, that every residential area is attacked if there is the slightest indication of terrorist activity, that previously enforced limits regarding collateral damage have been widened in the current conflict, that the policy of warning civilians before an attack has been abandoned, that drinking water supplies, bakeries and a grain mill have been destroyed, that a hospital (the Al-Indonesi hospital) has been bombed and that many of the hospitals in Gaza no longer function. That this devastation was inflicted exclusively on military targets or involved legitimate collateral damage is, not only ² District Court of The Hague 15 December 2023, ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2023:19744.

³ The Hague Court of Appeal 12 February 2024, ECLI:NL:GHDHA:2024:191.

*given its unprecedented scale, but also given the utterances of Israeli soldiers themselves, not plausible. Based on the above, the court also concludes that the violations of international humanitarian law at clear risk are serious.*⁴

4.2 Rulings International Court of Justice UN and advisory opinion

In a court case between South Africa and Israel concerning alleged violations of the Genocide Treaty with regard to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the International Court of Justice ruled on 26 January 2024 by way of an interlocutory judgment on the request for the imposition of provisional measures filed by South Africa.⁵

According to the court, the right of Palestinians not to be subjected to acts prohibited by the Genocide Convention is plausible. South Africa has the right to demand compliance by Israel with its obligations under the Genocide Convention. In order to prevent the dispute from worsening, and to ensure that it can be considered by the Court, the Court has seen fit to impose interim measures against Israel. The interim measures imposed by the court require Israel to (a) take all measures within its power to prevent genocide;

(b) immediately ensure that its own military personnel do not commit genocide; (c) take all measures within its capabilities to prosecute and punish incitement to genocide; (d) immediately take effective measures to enable the delivery of urgent basic services and humanitarian assistance; (e) to take effective measures to secure evidence relating to allegations of genocide and prevent its suppression; and (f) to report to the Court within one month on the measures taken. In the ruling on interim measures, the court also expresses its grave concerns about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in addition to calling for the release of the hostages by Hamas.

In a second interlocutory ruling on 26 February 2024, the ICJ stressed that Israel must implement the provisional measures and is bound by them to fully comply with its obligations under the Genocide Convention. In a third interlocutory ruling on 28 March 2024, the ICJ ruled that Israel must do everything necessary to ensure an unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid - such as food, water, electricity, medical supplies and medical care - to Palestinians in Gaza. Furthermore, the army should immediately ensure that there are no violations of the Genocide Convention. In a fourth interlocutory ruling on 24 May 2024, the ICJ again ruled that Israel must immediately and effectively implement the measures throughout the Gaza Strip, as previously ordered. Moreover, Israel should immediately halt its military offensive and other actions in certain parts of Gaza.

The ICJ issued an *Advisory Opinion* on 19 July 2024 on the practice of Israel's policies in the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem.⁶

⁴ The Hague Court of Appeal 12 February 2024, ECLI:NL:GHDHA:2024:191, paragraphs 5.16-5.18.

⁵ For the ruling, see: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

⁶ International Court of Justice 19 July 2024, *Advisory Opinion: Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*.

The United Nations General Assembly had requested this in 2022. In this *Advisory Opinion*, the Court concludes that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territories is unlawful, and that Israel is obliged to end this presence as soon as possible. Israel should immediately stop building new settlements. Existing settlements should be dismantled. The neo-deration policy and related activities, such as the deportation and forced displacement of populations and the annexation of territory, are unlawful according to the ICJ.

The court finds that the settlement policy involves violence by settlers and the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian population in violation of norms of international law. The court further ruled that Israel, as an occupying power, had enacted legislation and taken measures resulting in discrimination against the Palestinian population. Israel is also violating specific rights of the Palestinian people, such as access to water supply and other basic necessities of life. Finally, the court concludes that the Palestinians' right to self-determination is being violated.

4.3 Other reports

The Advisory Committee also took note of a 2024 report by Amnesty international, which concluded that Israel committed serious violations of the UN Genocide Convention in the period October 2023 - July 2024,⁷ and of the Advice of the Advisory Council on International Affairs to the Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 23 October 2024. In it, the Advisory Board, referring to aforementioned ICJ rulings and opinions, stresses that in the context of the conflict in Gaza and the other occupied territories '[...] the rules of international (humanitarian) law must be respected by (non-state actors in) third states. That is, the Netherlands and organisations based here have an obligation not to contribute in any way to the financing and maintenance of the occupation, to the maintenance of and (economic) cooperation with the settlements, and the violations of international law and human rights associated with the settlement policy; the Netherlands must make efforts to end or prevent violations of international (humanitarian) law by the parties to the conflict.' The Advisory Board sees a growing risk of political and legal 'complicity' for the Netherlands, as witnessed also by the ongoing national and international court cases.⁸

4.4 Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, based on court rulings, opinions and expert reports, it can be concluded that Israeli authorities have been and continue to be guilty of serious and systematic human rights violations, both in Gaza and in the occupied Palestinian territories. Given the severity of the

⁷ Amnesty International, 'You feel like you are subhuman,' Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, 2024.

⁸ Advisory Council on International Issues, Letter Opinion. Towards a new course for the Netherlands in Israel-Palestinian conflict, 23 October 2024.

human rights violations in Gaza and in the occupied Palestinian territories and their continuation, it is obvious to conclude that Radboud University should raise the question of whether there are obstacles to maintaining cooperation with Universities in Israel.

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5. Tel Aviv University analysis

5.1. Findings on contributions to human rights violations

This section aims to answer the following question: does Tel Aviv University directly and specifically contribute to serious and systematic human rights violations by the government? To answer this question, the following findings are relevant:

1. Through TauVentures, a venture capital fund of Tel Aviv University, the program Xcelerator is being financed. Through a call, startups are invited to offer or develop technologies to serve an Israeli security service. The website states: "The Xcelerator Defense Tech was established in response to the complex security situation in Israel over the past year, providing value to the Israeli Security Agency (Shabak) by identifying technologies that can impact the battlefield."⁹
2. Through TauVentures, Tel Aviv University has invested in Xtend, a company developing surveillance drones and drone systems used in the war in Gaza.¹⁰
3. TAU hosts the Erez programme, a programme for military personnel to obtain their bachelor's degree. This programme is also followed by military personnel in service. The aim of this programme is "the training of intellectual and broad-minded commanders, with rich military knowledge and academic quality; cultivating curious and critical combat officers ... [and] developing mature fighters, who exercise judgment and ethical and moral thinking."¹¹
4. There is a partnership between Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Engineering and the IDF within the Galim master's programme. Galim is set up to train cyber engineers who can enlist in IDF.¹² Galim is part of IDF's Atuda programme, an Academic Reserve Track within which future military personnel are trained.¹³
5. Another programme organised by TAU involves the Arazim project, which prepares excellent engineering and mathematics students for the secret services.¹⁴
6. There are several research collaborations between TAU, the government and IDF.¹⁵

⁹ <https://www.tauventures.co.il/programs-and-partnerships/>

¹⁰ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-developer-of-vr-drone-system-used-by-idf-in-hamas-war-raises-40m/>

¹¹ <https://www.972mag.com/tau-army-militarization-palestinian-students/#:~:text=The%20university%20is%20playing%20host,and%20well-educated%20academics.%E2%80%9D>

¹² <https://en-engineering.tau.ac.il/Engineering-Faculty-Electrical-Engineering-Galim-Program>

¹³ <https://atuda.org.il>, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atuda>

¹⁴ <https://www.972mag.com/tau-army-militarization-palestinian-students/#:~:text=The%20university%20is%20playing%20host,and%20well-educated%20academics.%E2%80%9D>

¹⁵ <https://english.tau.ac.il/research-main>

7. The Institute for National Security Studies is an external institute of Tel Aviv University, and is a think tank that aims to directly influence Israel's national security strategy. The institute is closely linked to IDF, several staff members have or had senior positions at IDF, including the Executive Director.¹⁶
8. Tel Aviv University hosts several security conferences on campus, including, in cooperation with the National Security Service, a security conference held on 25 February 2025, which focused on the main security and political issues currently facing Israel. Also among those present was the head of the Mossad, who was presented with an award.¹⁷ In late 2024, TAU already organised the first defence-tech summit in cooperation with IDF.¹⁸
9. There are several situations where directors are intertwined with the arms industry, government, military and security services. This interconnectedness is evident not only in the educational programmes mentioned (Erez, Galim, and Arazim), but also in administrative interconnectedness, such as at INSS (point 7) and at the Cyber Studies Centre, where the head of the Yuval Ne'eman Workshop for Science, Technology and Security also consistently held senior positions in the military.¹⁹
10. There are cases of Palestinian students complaining that their rights are being violated. Students at TAU are also known to have been detained by authorities during an annual Nakba Day protest.²⁰
11. TAU's president has publicly spoken out against the humanitarian crisis in Gaza on several occasions. Among other things, he spoke out at a conference on human rights violations organised by TAU. Most recently, he did so on 25 February 2025 at an INSS conference in collaboration with IDF.²¹

Consideration

The Advisory Committee believes that Tel Aviv University directly and specifically contributes to human rights violations committed by the Israeli government. Decisive for the Advisory Committee are findings 1 and 2. The Advisory Committee is of the opinion that in any case, based on those two collaborations of Tel Aviv University with the Israeli government and the IDF and affiliated services, it can be concluded that there are direct and specific contributions to human rights violations by the government. Particularly problematic for the Advisory Committee is the supply of items that are (could be) *directly* used in human rights violations in the Gaza war. In findings 1 and 2, this direct and specific contribution is financial: Tel Aviv University contributes financially to technologies and weapons that are (will be) used in the war in Gaza, where human rights abuses are widespread.

¹⁶ See, among others: <https://www.inss.org.il/person/tamir-hayman/>

¹⁷ <https://en.bmp.co.il/inss-2025>

¹⁸ https://english.tau.ac.il/news/defense_tech_summit

¹⁹ <https://en-sectech.tau.ac.il/chairman>. See also: <https://en-sectech.tau.ac.il/about>

²⁰ <https://www.972mag.com/israeli-campuses-palestinian-activists-safety/>

²¹ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-796933>, <https://en.bmp.co.il/inss-2025>.

Also problematic and decisive for the committee are findings 3 and 4. Tel Aviv exclusively provides military training for senior executives aimed at the military function of their participants. The commission considers this a direct and specific contribution to human rights violations.

Possibly problematic but not decisive for the committee are findings 5 to 9. Cooperation with IDF is frequent, e.g. through conferences and other training programmes (findings 5 and 8). Such cooperation with the government, the military and secret services is not problematic in principle, unless the university itself directly and specifically contributes to human rights violations through the cooperation. That risk does exist, but there is no conclusive evidence of it. TAU and IDF are also intertwined at the administrative level (see, e.g., findings 7 and 9). Administrative entanglement in Israel with the arms industry, military and security services is a history. This interconnectedness is not objectionable in itself either, unless the partner is guilty of systematic and serious human rights violations AND there is a direct and specific contribution by Tel Aviv University to it. This has not been proven in this situation, but many partnerships with the arms industry and government in research increase the risk of direct and specific knowledge transfer, which can lead to contribution to human rights violations.²² Regarding finding 10, there is insufficient information available on the background of the arrest and TAU's involvement in it.

It is notable that the chair of TAU has publicly and explicitly spoken out against human rights violations in Gaza and other Palestinian territories (finding 11). However, this does not alter the fact that, as mentioned, there are contributions by TAU to human rights violations by the government.

5.2 Findings of breaches of academic integrity

Findings 3, 4 and 5 under section 5.1 deal with the training of soldiers in the service, with TAU working with IDF within the Erez and Galim courses to train soldiers in the service to become leading officers and experts in the army. These 3 findings are also problematic if IDF has control over the curriculum of courses and there is otherwise close involvement of IDF in university affairs. It is not sufficiently clear whether IDF has control over this. If it does, the independence of the university is at stake. There is also then a risk of violation of the ALLEA Code.²³ In that case, the committee also finds the findings problematic on this ground.

²² In basic research, that risk is not present, or at least to a much lesser extent, and moreover only *indirectly* rather than directly and specifically. In applied research, that risk is real.

²³ ALLEA Code, paragraph 2.4, p. 7.

6. Conclusion on continued cooperation with Tel Aviv University

The Advisory Committee concludes that TAU contributes in a number of cases to direct and special violations of human rights and may be involved in violations of scientific integrity, more specifically with regard to joint training with IDF. It therefore recommends attaching a number of advantages to the continuation of the cooperation with TAU, and suspending the cooperation as long as these advantages are not met (see Assessment framework, p. 12, phase 2, options A3 and A4). Specifically, this means that the advice is to freeze the MoU with TAU and that the Executive Board requests TAU to:

- Stop financing (of startups) for the development of war assets;
- Terminate cooperation in exclusive military training;
- Assure the RU that the administrative entanglement with IDF will not result in TAU contributing to or being required to contribute to human rights violations, and indicate what measures will be taken to this end;
- To assure the RU that there are no research projects with IDF developing applied knowledge and equipment that can be directly used in the war in Gaza and the occupation in other Palestinian areas, and to indicate what measures will be taken to this end;
- Assure the RU that IDF has no final responsibility in any way for the content and design of university courses intended for (future) military personnel.

The Executive Board's mandate and the design of the Assessment Framework limit this advice to university-wide partnerships. However, the advisory committee recommends freezing alliances that fall outside this limited framework and also involve *direct* cooperation with TAU in research and education as soon as possible and not entering into any new collaborations for the time being. This applies, for example, to direct partnerships at faculty level. In large-scale collaborations (e.g. HorizonEurope) where there is a greater distance between research groups, it is reasonable to reconsider collaboration and possibly suspend direct collaboration if there is no breach of contract. (see Consideration Framework, phase 2, options C3 and D2). The committee may be asked for further advice in these cases.