

# Protesters demand Wits take public stand on Gaza

Calls for “academic boycott of Apartheid Israel”.

By Ihsaan Haffejee <sup>8 May 2024</sup>



Students, staff and alumni gathered to protest outside the Great Hall at Wits. Photo: Ihsaan Haffejee

Scores of students, staff and alumni from Wits University gathered on the steps of the campus Great Hall on Tuesday, 7 May, to demand that the university take a public position on the Gaza war.

A placard read: “As you go to class today remember that there are no universities in Gaza”.

Muzzammil Tayob, from the Wits Palestine Solidarity Committee, said, “We are now seven months into the genocide and Wits University has chosen not to take a stance, not even to support the call for an immediate and sustainable ceasefire.”

Tayob called for “an academic boycott of Apartheid Israel”.

A letter addressed to the vice chancellor and council chairperson was read out. It said Israel’s systematic destruction of [Gaza’s education system](#) “places an undeniable obligation on Wits to speak and act with conviction”.

“Wits remains implicated in doing business with Israeli companies, accepting donations from the Israeli embassy, and employing a former IDF officer as one of the University’s professors. Wits’ record regarding the treatment of pro-Palestini activists is also poor.”

However, previously, the university’s strategic partnerships office head said no new agreements were signed with any Israeli universities over the past eight years.

The protesters’ letter makes five demands: full disclosure of Wits’ relations with Israel, Israel-aligned institutions and companies; a public position in solidarity with Palestine; the adoption of a BDS position regarding procurement, investment and collaborations; a sincere reflection on the meaning of academic freedom; an end to censorship and intimidation of pro-Palestinian activists and activities on campus.

In a response to student demands for a boycott in November 2023, vice chancellor Zebon Vilakazi had said, “Neither mys

nor the senate or others directs who it is that fellow academics engage with. This is the prerogative of academics and is in line with their right to exercise academic freedom as is enshrined in the (non-negotiable) values of the University, and in accordance with their individual moral and political agency.”

Tara Weinberg, a history lecturer, said, “Almost all the schools and universities in Gaza have been bombed ... It’s our duty as lecturers and staff at Wits to take a stand and demand that no child, no young person has to go through that situation in order to learn or study.”

“The memorandum will be reviewed, and the University will respond to the students in due course,” said Wits senior communications officer Buhle Zuma.

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