

Summary of the negotiations between the global student movement and Gothenburg University's management

A couple days after the start of the encampment, the GUSP's demands are sent to the vice-chancellor Malin Broberg via email to start the negotiations.

1. First meeting – 20 May 2024

Context: The meeting was arranged in response to the GUSP email. The rector gave a short time frame of 30 minutes for the meeting, and framed it repeatedly as “information” rather than negotiation. Present at the meeting was the vice chancellor Malin Broberg, her secretary Emilia Rung, three students, a lawyer representing the students and two ombudsmen.

Students’ position: During the first meeting with the university's management, the student movement presented its demands: that (1) the university should suspend cooperation with Israeli universities, (2) provide support to Palestinian students and researchers, and increase opportunities for collaborations with Palestinian institutions, and finally, (3) That the GU leadership officially and publicly condemn Israel's genocide of Palestinians.

The students challenged the rector, Malin Broberg, on whether the collaboration were consistent with the university's ethical guidelines according to her, especially given Israel's attacks on educational infrastructure in Gaza, also referred to as scholasticide. It was made clear at the end of the meeting that the encampment would not move until the demands were met.

The institution's response: Regarding the students’ demands, the vice-chancellor answered:

Demand 1 / The university should suspend cooperation with Israeli universities: “Academic collaborations are a fundamental prerequisite for the university and are chosen with care based on the needs of research and education. The university's main tasks are education and research, not pursuing foreign policy issues.”

Demand 2 / Provide support to Palestinian students and researchers, and increase opportunities for collaborations with Palestinian institutions: “We would like to highlight that GU offers support to all students at the university, regardless of nationality or country of education.”

Demand 3 / That the GU leadership officially and publicly condemn Israel's genocide of Palestinians: “When it comes to positions towards other countries, the university follows the foreign policy assessments made by the government.”

The vice-chancellor informed the students of logistical concerns (regarding the use of bathrooms and access to GU facilities), and although she voiced finding the events in Gaza very saddening personally she refused to recognize any responsibility or need for action from Gothenburg University.

2. Second meeting – 27 May 2024

Context: At this meeting, four students, the vice chancellor and her secretary were present. During that time, students at the camp also started wider actions such as die-ins and events in front of the main university building. At the beginning of the meeting, the vice-chancellor recognized that the students had been very peaceful and respectful of campus property.

Students' position: Since the main argument from the vice-chancellor's email response to GUSP's demands was that the university should not get involved in foreign policy, the negotiators chose to reframe the issue as an ethical concern.

The students focused their counter argumentation on two key points: 1) calling attention to the ethical conflict stemming from collaborating with educational institutions responsible for core functions of an apartheid state and 2) that the university's responsibility in upholding academic freedom and autonomy from the Ministry of Education's directives as well as abiding to international law and its own ethical guidelines.

1) Apartheid State

The students started by reminding the vice-chancellor that according to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Israel is "guilty of policies and practices that constitute the crime of apartheid", a "crime against humanity under customary international law".

The students then went on to show, building on Maya Wind's research and the WASSAP BDS report investigation, the role that universities GU is currently collaborating with such as University of Haifa, Ben Gurion University (BGU), Tel Aviv University, play an important role in upholding the apartheid state.

To close this point, the students asked how these collaborations passed the SUHF Global Responsible Engagement: Checklist assessment, and requested a new assessment of on-going projects.

2) Academic Freedom

Again referring to the SUHF's own manifest the students reminded the vice-chancellor that "The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of society [...]. Freedom, and independence are the basis for the existence of universities. This is done by ensuring a 'strong student influence and secure participation of international students

in Swedish education". This allowed the students to show that the university's choice to remain so inactive was a denial of representation of students' voices.

Finally, the students closed by reiterating the need for the university to take a stand against Israel's apartheid policy, which is recognized by international bodies. A Palestinian student expressed disappointment at the lack of support from the university, pointing to the tragedy in Rafah. The students questioned the university's inaction despite clear human rights abuses and demanded that collaborations with Israeli universities end. Another Palestinian student at GU shared the impact the conflict has had on his studies and the lack of support from the university, clearly showing the institution's inaction.

The university's response: The vice-chancellor refused to investigate whether or not the cooperation with Israeli universities violates SUHF ethical guidelines and avoided giving clear answers as to what could make her change her position, while also evoking that she may be open to doing so later in the fall of 2024. She also mentioned that the Minister of Education has great influence over the decision, which could violate the principle of the university's independence.

3. Third meeting – 5 June 2024

Context: Four students participated in the meeting with the vice-chancellor and her secretary. One of the students opened the negotiation by speaking of his family in Gaza and relatives that had been killed to show the very real and personal effects of the genocide for Palestinian students at Gothenburg University.

Students' position: The students continued to demand concrete measures from the university to support Palestinians and criticized the lack of transparency regarding the use of SUHF checklists for international collaborations. They pointed out that there had been no assessments of the collaborations at all (no documentation was found by the registrar), even though the university previously claimed that they had done assessments. As the VC responded that the SUHF Checklist was new (from 2023) and therefore had not been used, the students countered that some of the collaborations had been initiated after that, with the latest collaboration initiated as late as 2024, in the midst of the genocide. The students' also pointed out the broad support within the university for their demands, referring to the petition signed by more than 200 researchers employed at GU. They accused the management of hypocrisy, which they said damaged the university's reputation.

The university's response: The VC stated that an assessment of cooperation with Israeli universities had been made but refused to give details about this. She also expressed skepticism about quickly canceling collaborations with Russian universities and said that the University of Gothenburg does not always follow SUHF guidelines in its international collaborations.

4th protest action – June 11, 2024

When the VC refused to allow the students to meet with the university board to discuss their demands, the students staged a protest in which they chained themselves outside of the meeting room. The police were called in, and some students were removed. Two students finally got to meet the university board and hand over information. During the meeting, the VC falsely claimed that the agreements with the Israeli universities are governed at the EU level and announced that the collaborations will not be terminated.

Summary: The student movement's struggle to get the University of Gothenburg to end cooperation with Israeli universities and take a stand for Palestinian rights was met with resistance from the management, which proved unwilling to reconsider its position. The situation culminated in a protest action where the students tried to make their voices heard through direct action. Despite this, we still have an ongoing communication with Gothenburg University's management via email, and we will not give up until all our demands are met.