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Endangered Scholars Worldwide

Attacks on higher education communities are occurring at an alarming rate worldwide, threatening the safety and well-being of scholars, students, and academic staff, as well as the autonomy of higher education institutions. While we continue to publish regular updates in *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, in response to a global increase in threats to academic freedom, Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) has expanded its presence as an online publication under the auspices of the New University in Exile Consortium (<https://www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org>), sharing frequent updates on new and developing cases in contribution to the Consortium's efforts to create a supportive intellectual community for threatened or exiled scholars.



For the most current information and ways in which you can be involved in our efforts to defend academic freedom and free expression, we invite you to visit our website <https://www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net>.

If you are aware of a scholar or student whose case you believe we should investigate, please get in touch with us at esw@newschool.edu.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Quarterly Report

Armed conflicts are among the biggest obstacles to academic freedom globally, not just because of the collateral effects of the death and destruction they precipitate but also through direct attacks on higher

education institutions. In its recently published report *Education Under Attack 2026*, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified at least 377 separate attacks on higher education in 2024 and 2025, which resulted in the death, injury, or abduction of over 570 students and staff and the detention or arrest of more than 2,300. The increasing intensity and scale of warfare, new military technologies, and states' wavering commitments to international law on armed conflict exacerbate the impact of war on universities and academic freedom.

The higher education sector in Gaza Strip, Palestine, is currently one of the most heavily impacted as a result of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invasion following the October 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas on Israel. In the context of this invasion, which, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, has resulted in the death of 73,054 Palestinians, the injury of 173,480, and the displacement of over 2 million, UN experts have argued since 2024 that a “scholasticide” is ongoing in Gaza, with strong evidence suggesting that Palestinian schools and universities are facing systemic attacks by the IDF intending to destroy the education system. According to a joint survey by the West Bank-based firm Arab World for Research and Development, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and UNESCO, 95 percent of 206 buildings surveyed across 38 university campuses in Gaza were either destroyed or severely damaged as of November 2025, with the total damage estimated at about US\$375 million. Noting increased political limitations and reduced funding for independent monitoring, which can restrict documentation, GCPEA recorded 24 attacks on higher education institutions in Gaza in 2024 and 1 in 2025; the last documented attack was the September 14, 2025, IDF bombing of an Islamic University building in Gaza City, which killed at least seven internally displaced persons who were sheltering there.

More generally, GCPEA notes that the military use of schools and universities is among the greatest threats to education. Sudan is a case in point. In the civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and

the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), ongoing since 2023, both sides reportedly have been using universities for military purposes, which exposes them to direct attacks or collateral damage. On June 4, 2023, the SAF hit the International University of Africa in Khartoum during clashes with the RSF, killing 10 people. In May 2025 Omdurman Islamic University was occupied by the SAF, following its clash with the RSF on the university's grounds. Sudanese universities have also become targets themselves. In 2024 RSF forces looted the University of Gezira twice, stealing equipment and destroying infrastructure. These incidents demonstrate the importance of upholding international law in warfare, including shielding universities from armed conflict.

However, evolving military technologies make such efforts increasingly challenging. While new technologies enable greater precision in targeting, they also allow militaries to inflict damage over greater distances more easily, extending the impact of warfare beyond frontlines. Together with a weakened international law regime, the enhanced military capacities increase the danger to academic institutions. This can be clearly observed in the case of Ukraine, where Russian forces have been consistently targeting universities with drones and air strikes since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. According to the Ukrainian National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, as reported by *Times Higher Education* in March 2026, more than 400 of 625 Ukrainian higher education institutions have been damaged, 43 displaced, and 11 completely destroyed. Most recently, on December 27, 2025, Russian drones and air strikes hit dormitories belonging to Kyiv National Aviation University, damaging infrastructure. The same institution was similarly attacked on June 17, 2025, when multiple students suffered injuries. Two students were killed on April 13, 2025, when Russian missiles hit Sumy State University's conference center.

The danger to universities and schools posed by the blurring boundaries of armed conflict was demonstrated in February–March 2026 during the US-Israeli war against Iran. According to the Iranian



Ministry of Science and Technology, as of April 2026, at least 30 Iranian universities were hit by US and Israeli forces. IDF officials have claimed that using campuses for military purposes, such as training military personnel or conducting military research, turns them into legitimate military targets. This reasoning dangerously stretches international law, under which universities can only be considered legitimate targets if they are used for direct military purposes such as stationing units or stockpiling ammunition. Given the high level of integration between national higher education systems and militaries, such definitional stretching puts many universities in conflict zones at risk. Indeed, in late March 2026, following repeated university bombings by Israel, Iran declared that it would likewise consider universities in Israel and the Gulf region legitimate targets. This significantly disrupted higher education in the region as many universities suspended operations or closed down their campuses, transitioning to remote education. In a previous conflict between the two countries, in June 2025, an Iranian ballistic missile, purportedly launched to retaliate for Israel's assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientists, hit the Weizmann Institute of Science, a public research university in Israel, damaging or destroying 90 percent of the institute's structures.

Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) is deeply concerned about the highly destructive and long-lasting impacts of armed conflict on higher education. ESW condemns the targeting of universities in conflict zones, as well as their direct military use, calling on parties of armed conflicts to uphold limits of warfare, as articulated in international law. We invite the global community to join our call.