

Susi Wurmbrand, Chair
Radek Šimik
Sergio Baauw
Magdalena Lohninger
Caterina Donati
Éva Dékány
Ora Matushansky
Marcus Pöchtrager
Andrew Nevins

May 17, 2022

Dear members of the GLOW Board,

It is our understanding that the GLOW 2024 conference is planned to be held at a public university in Israel, and we would like to request that the board reconsider this decision, possibly opening the topic to a broader discussion. The board should be aware that holding GLOW in Israel is a political statement every bit as much as the decision not to. Once the matter has been introduced into the GLOW agenda, any decision the board will take has both political and ethical ramifications for the organization, the community it represents and its international standing.

The reasons for our request are as follows:

1. Accessibility

- Academics and students from Gaza and from the West Bank will not be able to attend: the Israeli military will not allow them to enter Israel through the checkpoints that separate the occupied Palestinian territories from Israel.
- Linguists from many countries will not be able to attend, either because their countries have no diplomatic relations with Israel (e.g., Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Algeria, Tunisia) or because travelling to Israel might incur harassment at the Israeli border and/or upon return to their home countries (including those which maintain diplomatic relations with Israel but oppose “normalization” of relations, e.g., cultural and scientific exchanges, for example Jordan and Egypt.)
- Western participants risk interrogation, confiscation of personal belongings and may be arbitrarily denied entry. Based on the [accumulated experience of many travelers, including visiting academics](#), one can surmise that the Israeli border authorities rather systematically interrogate non-white travelers, travelers with Arab or Muslim-sounding names, travelers with « Middle-East accents » even if they travel on Western passports. As well, there are [recorded](#) cases of deliberate humiliation of women through strip searches, including in intimate body parts, and intrusive questioning.
- Additionally, any person, Western or not, who has participated in political activity critical of Israeli policies, signed petitions or letters or written articles etc., may be interrogated at the border and denied entry (e.g., Noam Chomsky in May 2010.)

- Finally, students and faculty who are members of academic, student or professional organizations that have endorsed the international Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) call, risk denial of entry at the Israeli border. This is enshrined in Israeli law. Given that 350 academic departments, programs, centers, unions and societies worldwide have responded to the call of Palestinian civil society, and endorsed statements in support of Palestinian rights (most recently, the [Middle East Studies Association \(MESA\)](#) and the [Harvard Crimson](#)), it is possible that colleagues presenting at the conference, or wishing to attend, will be interrogated at entry as to their academic and political affiliations, membership in professional societies, religion and ethnic origins.

We are sure that the GLOW board, like us, believes that GLOW should remain open and accessible to all linguists, to all users of all human languages.

2. Obstruction of research and learning in Palestinian universities

Specifically related to our role as researchers and teachers are the practices of the Israeli authorities that obstruct and stifle research and learning at Palestinian universities.

- The ongoing disruption of academic life under Israeli occupation - restrictions on the freedom of movement by a regime of permits and roadblocks, frequent military incursion into campuses, arbitrary detentions and expulsions - is well-documented in the international press and in reports by human rights organization and specialized NGOs.
- A recent example: In February 2022, Israel issued a [directive](#), setting an annual quota of 100 for foreign lecturers and researchers and 150 for foreign students at Palestinian universities, for the term of one semester and only in fields which the military and civilian authorities decree as “essential”. This procedure is a direct hit at international scientific collaboration of exactly the sort that GLOW encourages and sustains. Despite international condemnation, the directive is set to go into effect in May 2022.

One cannot but discern a pattern of a consistent and multi-faceted policy of Israeli interference with the normal functioning of academic life. Holding GLOW in Israel and overlooking these policies would constitute their (implicit) endorsement.

3. Apartheid

Within the past 18 months alone, four extensive reports have been published, concluding that the Israeli regime now amounts to apartheid, as defined by international law ([B'Tselem](#), Israel's leading human rights organization; [Human Rights Watch](#); [Amnesty International](#); and the [United Nations Human Rights Council](#).)

The Amnesty report assesses that

“...almost all of Israel’s civilian administration and military authorities, as well as governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, are involved in the enforcement of the system of apartheid against Palestinians across Israel and the OPT and against Palestinian refugees and their descendants outside the territory. Amnesty International has also concluded that the patterns of proscribed acts perpetuated by Israel both inside

Israel and in the OPT form part of a systematic as well as widespread attack directed against the Palestinian population, and that the inhuman or inhumane acts committed within the context of this attack have been committed with the intention to maintain this system and **amount to the crime against humanity of apartheid under both the Apartheid Convention and the Rome Statute.**" see [here](#), (pp. 12-13)

As these recent reports highlight, such discrimination is not restricted to the Palestinian population in the territories occupied in 1967 and extends to the Palestinians who are Israeli citizens who are regularly harassed and threatened by Israeli police, secret services and Jewish vigilante groups. To highlight academia, Palestinian students in Israeli campuses are subjected to almost daily police harassment and to housing discrimination. Public gatherings by Palestinian students are violently broken up, and their political expression within the campuses is systematically silenced by the authorities. This treatment, although well known and documented, is effectively sanctioned, if not encouraged, by the university authorities, and relies for its continuation on the silent collusion of Israeli university faculty ([here](#)).

Holding GLOW in Israel would defy a growing international consensus that the discriminatory practices of Israel and its state institutions should not be ignored or accommodated. We speculate that this is the reason why a full third of polled members of GLOW rejected Israel as a potential venue, and may, alongside many others, choose not to participate in any aspect of it (abstract submission, attendance, reviewing). Is the board ready to face the rift which would be created within our community?

For all these reasons, we believe that holding GLOW in Israel is inappropriate and strongly urge the Board to reconsider its decision.

Respectfully,

Ad Neeleman (UCL)
Anders Holmberg (Newcastle)
Andrew Koontz-Garboden (Manchester)
Anna Cardinaletti (University of Venice)
Anna Roussou (University of Patras)
David Adger (QMUL)
Eric Wehrli (University of Geneva)
Gillian Ramchand (UIT)
Guido Vanden Wyngaerd (Leuven)
Hagit Borer (QMUL)
Hamida Demirdache (Nantes University and CNRS)
Hazel Pearson (QMUL)
Isabelle Roy (Nantes University and CNRS)
Itamar Francez (University of Chicago)
Ivy Sichel (UC Santa Cruz)

Klaus Abels (UCL)
Laurie Tuller (University of Tours)
Lina Choueiri (American University of Beirut)
Linnaea Stockall (QMUL)
Luisa Marti (QMUL)
Neil Smith (UCL)
Philippe Prevost (University of Tours)
Phoevos Panagiotidis (University of Cyprus)
Ur Shlonsky (University of Geneva)
Youssef Haddad (University of Florida)