

**Paper Title: ‘Israel-Palestine War Counter Motion’**

**Date: 14/11/2023**

**Author/proposer: Nyasha Mutembwa (DUSA PRESIDENT)**

**Position: None**

**Seconder/s: EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Position/s:**

**Introduction**

[This motion was written at on 14th November, following extensive internal discussions within the Executive Committee. Therefore, it is tabled as a late motion with permission of the SRC Chair]

As a team, we utilise DUSA platforms to keep students informed of the work of the SRC, including publishing the votes, motions, and the recordings of the meetings. This year, we have a manifesto commitment to, ‘empower the SRC, protect, and amplify the student voice,’ under the broader theme of, ‘reconnecting representation.’ We champion this because we recognise the importance of voicing the achievements and challenges of the student body, and we strive to engage with as many students as possible to ensure every student feels represented. While we sit as Councillors on the SRC ourselves, as an Executive team, we also sit as members of DUSA’s Board of Trustees. This means that we are to amplify the student voice and carry out act with recommendations from the SRC without compromising the governance structure of the organisation, where we are bound by various legislative processes.

In relation to motion titled ‘University and DUSA to call for immediate end of the Israel-Palestine war,’~~,~~ we propose certain adjustments to address key points that represent the interests of the students effectively and efficiently, without the need to defer to Board on our next steps with.

The following points outline our position on this atter.

**1. Statement Support and University Engagement**

The Executive collectively supports the Council’s recommendation to urge the University to issue a more comprehensive and improved statement. We will communicate to the Principal’s Office our support of this. However, we propose an additional step, we suggest that Councillors encourage students to actively lobby the University for a more significant push too. There is often a misconception that DUSA and the University are the same and this collaborative effort can amplify the impact of our advocacy, and show to other students that DUSA is independent of the University. It’s important to recognise that the Executive are only a small part of the SRC – all SRC Councillors have the ability to further escalate student interests and lobby as an established Council.

**2. Addressing Student Frustrations:**

To ensure autonomy and efficiency in implementing these actions, we propose refining the approach. Instead of just writing a new statement, we recommend establishing a dedicated working group. This group, consisting of Executive members and other interested individuals within the SRC will have the autonomy to devise and implement actions throughout the academic year in relation to the matter at hand that are achievable within our Governance structure.

**3. City-Wide Partnerships and Solidarity:**

In line with the manifesto commitment to, 'innovative city-wide partnerships,' especially given Dundee's twinning with Nablus, we acknowledge the recommendation to establish contact with the University or its Students’ Association in Nablus. To further enhance this initiative, we suggest that the SRC working group tasked with formulating an appropriate statement to express solidarity and should include representatives with expertise or connections relevant to the situation in Nablus. This ensures a more informed and impactful approach.

Conclusion:

In summary, we are proposing these adjustments to enhance the impact and effectiveness of the SRC’s recommendations. We intend to present these refined recommendations to the SRC during the meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 14th, reflecting our commitment to proactive, impactful action and a balanced consideration of the issues at hand, while utilising the power of the Exec team.

**The Original Motion**

I cannot give full justice to the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the short time I have to write this motion and would recommend councillors read around the topic. Some excellent concise articles can be found on Al Jazeera [[HERE](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/9/whats-the-israel-palestine-conflict-about-a-simple-guide)]. Briefly, the creation of Israel in 1948 caused the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Since 1967, Israel has engaged in settler-colonialism in the West Bank with an extensive surveillance and control regime carried out both by the Israeli army and the Palestinian Authority. Since 2007, the Gaza Strip, home to 2 million people, has been blockaded, with access tightly controlled by the occupying power, Israel.

On 7th October, Hamas, the government of the Gaza Strip, launched an attack on Israel, killing, wounding and kidnapping several hundreds soldiers and civilians. Israel immediately counterattacked and has been bombing Gaza non-stop. The Israeli Defence Minister has ordered a total siege of Gaza, allowing in no food, water, fuel, access, referring to Palestinians as “human animals”. As an example of the immediate consequences of this total siege, hospitals have now run out of back-up power, which means all patients on life support, including babies and children, are now dead. As I am writing this at 10am GMT 14th October, Israel is threatening an imminent ground invasion and ordering 1 million people in north Gaza to ‘evacuate’ south. They have also bombed the only crossing between Egypt and Gaza, meaning there is no escape for Palestinians.

The disparity of force is so overwhelmingly on the side of Israel. It is funded by Western, especially US, military aid. Meanwhile, Western governments including Britain and the EU are cutting off aid to Palestine in the middle of these war crimes. The overwhelming consensus amongst the British political and media elite is supportive of Israel, including openly supportive of their publicly announced intention to commit further war crimes of collective punishment and ethnic cleansing.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on Saturday 20th February 2022, by Thursday the University and student union had put out a statement: "It is our sincere hope that, even at this stage, a more peaceful solution can be found to the current conflict that avoids bloodshed and tragedy." A fortnight later, they put out a further statement outlining: "the University’s unequivocal condemnation of the invasion... We must continue to hope that international pressure on Russia will have a positive effect, however bleak the situation may look today."

No public statement has come this time, as we face the real prospect of a genocide, aided and abetted by our own government. I wrote to the Principal asking why we have put out no statement on the current war. This was the University’s response: "The current situation is tragic with a shocking level of unjustifiable violence against innocent people. But it is also very complex and there will be many different perspectives on it. For that reason the University will not be taking a public stance on the matter."

This is totally unacceptable. It is perfectly reasonable for the University to produce a statement condemning war crimes. To give two examples, Exeter University and their Student Guild jointly published a statement [[HERE](https://www.exeterguild.com/article-post/support-for-students-affected-by-recent-global-events-in-the-middle-east)] condemning violence and hate including on campus, Sussex Student Union states they [[HERE](https://sussexstudent.com/news/article/isreal-palestine-statement)] “[stand] fiercely against war crimes, violence and violations of international law in the Israel-Palestine region, including the decades of events that have led to those unfolding right now.” Some universities are publishing opinion pieces from their academics, providing expert information and analysis [[HERE](https://www.up.ac.za/news/post_3188454-up-expert-opinion-resistance-is-dignity-the-7th-october-palestinian-uprising)].

There are thus many kinds of statements that can be made, some more explicitly political or educational than others. But to produce no statement is unacceptable moral cowardice. It is perfectly possible to produce a sensitive and inoffensive statement that denounces war and violence. There is an implication in the silence. I invite councillors to consider, during Black History Month, what the difference could be in the silence now compared to the instant and clear reaction when Ukrainians were dying.

One of the city councillors for West End ward which contains most of the university and most campus accommodation is Nadia El-Nakla, wife of the First Minister Humza Yousaf. Her family are currently stuck in Gaza. This is an issue which effects people across Dundee. Our University should do the bare minimum and use its voice to contribute to peace and justice.

Dundee has a strong tradition of support for Palestine. It is twinned with Nablus [[HERE](https://www.dundee-nablus.org.uk/)] and the University has links with An-Najah National University. A large rally is scheduled for 2pm 14th October in the city centre.

I attach below in an appendix the text of my speech to be read out in my absence at the rally.**[Redacted on request of SRC Chair]**

**Conclusion + Motion**

1. SRC calls on the University to issue a public statement condemning the war, condemning war crimes, including the occupation of the West Bank, the blockade of Gaza, the siege of Gaza and ethnic cleansing of Palestine.
2. SRC calls on DUSA to do the same.
3. SRC calls on DUSA to reach out to An-Najah National University in Nablus, Palestine and offer our solidarity; SRC calls on the University to reach out to An-Najah National University and offer support.

**Appendix:**

Text of speech to be delivered at the Palestine solidarity rally in Dundee 14th October.

I am in England and am unable to be here. Thank you to my comrades for reading this out for me.

My name is TAW-nish-ta (Tánaiste) I'm a 3rd year Community Education student at the University of Dundee. I remember when Russia invaded Ukraine on Saturday 20th February 2022, by Thursday my university and student union had put out a statement: "It is our sincere hope that, even at this stage, a more peaceful solution can be found to the current conflict that avoids bloodshed and tragedy."

A fortnight later, they put out a further statement outlining: "the University’s unequivocal condemnation of the invasion... We must continue to hope that international pressure on Russia will have a positive effect, however bleak the situation may look today."

No public statement has come this time, as we face the real prospect of a genocide, aided and abetted by our own government and so-called Leader of the Opposition. I directly asked the Principal why we have put out no statement. This was the University’s response: "The current situation is tragic with a shocking level of unjustifiable violence against innocent people. But it is also very complex and there will be many different perspectives on it. For that reason the University will not be taking a public stance on the matter."

I have no words for this act of moral cowardice. No words. What is complex about ethnic cleansing? What is complex about collective punishment? Which syllable of genocide do they need repeating? I saw a tweet which summed it up so well: "Universities be like 'We support genocide and apartheid. Please seek mental health support.'"

The leadership of my university are making the judgment that it is not in their institutional interest to even condemn genocide. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps the balance of power and PR is that actually to remain silent is in Dundee University’s best interest.

Our task as students is to change their calculation by all means available to us. There are many methods available. We have a student council and student union. They can be used. We can organise mass letters. And other tactics exist.

Our cause is moral, is just, and is seen to be so by the majority of students and staff at my university. They are waiting to be stirred at action, to be mobilised, to be quickened. I would like to announce my contribution to this campaign.

[Redacted on request of SRC Chair]

One thing we have learnt so brutally in the comparison of how Ukraine and Palestine have been treated is that Black Lives Don't Matter. The imminent extermination of 2 million Gazans does not provoke our governments let alone our universities, to offer even token support for universal human rights. In the circumstances, [redacted]

I know the University cares about its public image. I gently suggest to them that "[redacted]

I hope that my University [redacted] extends its compassion to the millions in Palestine who, for only the crime of existing, are being hourly killed.