

## **Open Letter**

### **Against scientific cooperation with the Israeli repressive system**

[14 oktober 2016]

The LAW-TRAIN project is funded by the European Union as being an approved project of the EU Horizon 2020 program for research and innovation. It is coordinated by the Israeli University of Bar Ilan and includes the participation of the Israeli Ministry of Public Security/Israeli National Police. European participants are: the Ministry of Justice/Judiciary Police of Portugal, the Ministry of Interior of Spain/Guardia Civil, the Federal Public Service of Justice of Belgium and the Catholic University of Leuven, among other private companies and research institutes. The project aims at developing a unified methodology for police interrogations of suspects in international crime.

Due to Israel's ongoing violations of international law, international cooperation with the Israeli Ministry of Public Security and the Israeli National Police is ethically unacceptable and is a violation of the responsibilities of the High Contracting Parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In addition, the Ministry is responsible for the Israeli police and prison staff, which have been repeatedly denounced by the United Nations, the European Union and many human rights organizations for the use of torture, racism and other illegal, degrading and inhumane practices in their interrogation techniques.

Furthermore, the Israeli university Bar Ilan, which will coordinate this project, is an integral part of the military-industrial-scientific complex that sustains Israel's regime of colonial repression against the Palestinian people. Bar Ilan holds an academic program exclusively for the training of members of the General Security Services of Israel, the Shin Bet, while in active service. The Shin Bet (or Shabak) is an organization that is notorious for its use of torture and practice of other human rights abuses. Bar Ilan also founded the first college in an illegal settlement, Ariel. In addition, like all Israeli universities, it practices discriminatory policies against Palestinian students.

The project LAW TRAIN legitimizes de facto Israel's occupation and system of repression and its daily violations of the basic human rights. The Catholic University of Leuven is tasked with the preparation of the 'Report on the Legal Framework' of the project. By doing this the Leuven University justifies Israel's system of repression.

We recall that in 2011, civil society, academic associations and Palestinian students appealed to the European academic world to refuse these EU facilitated cooperations and financially supported projects and stressed that: *"European universities and research institutions that conduct joint research with Israeli military companies or other organizations that assist the suppression of Palestinian rights provide the material and political support that enable and embolden Israel to continue infringing upon international law with impunity. [...] Far from existing in an 'apolitical' bubble, joint research of this kind directly contributes to the injustices and violations of international law and basic rights faced by Palestinians."*

We are motivated by their appeal for support by and our deep concern for the Palestinian people, including Palestinian academics, struggling to maintain some semblance of normal life in unbearably

difficult circumstances of military occupation and denial of basic human rights. In particular, we call to mind the teachers and students who have spent time in Israeli prisons, or who are currently imprisoned in Israeli prisons. We highlight as well the recent rise of imprisonments of underage Palestinians, who are subject to illegal detention, deprived of their basic rights and constantly exposed to abuse and torture.

In August 2016 the Portuguese government withdrew completely from the project after the above mentioned concerns were raised. We urge the Belgian institutions to follow that example and join with our colleagues from several European countries universities who have taken similar positions. We ask: the Federal Public Service of Justice in Belgium to immediately withdraw from this project; the Catholic University of Leuven to immediately withdraw from this project; the European Commission to cease support for the LAW TRAIN project and adopt clear criteria for project evaluation that ensure ethical and responsible use of the public money managed by the EU for research purposes.

We want to be a voice of the Belgian academic world that is aware that the values of democracy, justice and freedom can only survive if society as a whole is willing to defend them.

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