

## Statement of the Executive Committee of ESU on the ongoing conflict in the Middle East

The recent terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas on October 7th has once again escalated the ongoing conflict in the region. The European Students' Union strongly condemns Hamas and the deplorable targeting of any and all civilian lives. ESU stands firmly on the need to protect civilians from regional escalations in accordance with international law and expresses its deep concern and empathy for all the victims.

Innocent civilians in Israel have endured horrendous acts, including sexual violence and raping of women and LGBTQIA+ persons, the use of children as human shields, large scale abductions, and the murder of their loved ones with entire families murdered. The severity of this abhorrent violence directed at (Israeli) Jews is unprecedented as it is the most severe attack on Jews since the Shoah, resulting in suffering that is beyond words. The European Students' Union therefore extends its solidarity with the people of Israel, the global Jewish community around the world and all the families affected by this and calls on the immediate release of civilians held hostage in Gaza by Hamas.

It is also critical to send a clear message that effective counterterrorism measures should not, in any circumstance, come at the cost of humanitarian aid and access to basic resources like electricity, food and water being denied to innocent civilians in Gaza. It is imperative to safeguard the right to life and physical well-being of the civilian Palestinian population in Gaza. ESU deeply regrets the loss of lives in Gaza and we call on the international community to be vigilant in terrorist organisations abusing critical civilian infrastructure, as well as on Israel to fully respect international humanitarian law, the Safe Schools Declaration and to ensure the access of the population in Gaza to basic resources. Anyone that wishes to leave Gaza should be able to do so safely. The European Students' Union therefore extends its solidarity with Palestinian people and to all families globally affected,

Within Europe's higher education area, the European Students' Union also emphasises the need to ensure the safety of all students. Antisemitism has been on the rise in Europe, often exacerbated by developments in the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict. Furthermore, it also increases anti-Muslim sentiments, fueling racism and Islamophobia in Europe. The overall concern for the safety of students in Europe extends beyond the confines of higher education institutions since student life occurs both on and off campuses. As a result, the responsibility for guaranteeing the safety of students falls upon various service providers, especially those associated with housing, as well as higher education institutions and public authorities. Access to free counselling services should be ensured for all students who need psychological support. Additionally, the safety of any student who aligns themselves with either side of the conflict must be ensured as well, as long as their expressions and actions do not cross the boundaries of discrimination, antisemitism, islamophobia and racism or become legally prohibited. ESU is deeply concerned by recent reports on discriminatory and violent incidents occurring on campuses across Europe.

The European Students' Union has consistently advocated for human rights, and we emphasise that international humanitarian law mandates the protection of all civilians, and especially in times of conflict. An end to the vicious cycle of violence that has been shaking the region over again can only be achieved by effectively countering those who perpetuate terrorism and violate international humanitarian law and human rights, and by promoting a road to peace and reconciliation.

In these troubled times, our organisation stands resolutely for the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law and calls for a swift and just resolution to the conflict that respects the dignity and well-being of all civilians affected.