

The Black Flag Action Group in Israeli Academia



Background

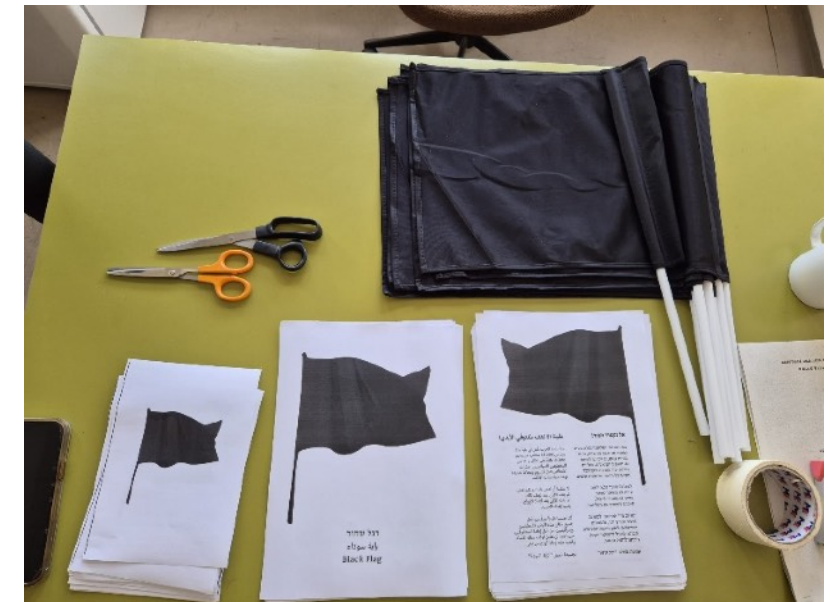
- On October 7th 2023, Hamas conducted a massacre in Jewish towns and villages near the Gaza Strip.
- The attack resulted in more than 1,200 casualties, and more than 200 hostages were kidnapped to Gaza.
- In response, Israel waged a war against Hamas, with the aim of deposing the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip and securing the release of the hostages.
- From the very beginning, elements of retaliation and revenge loomed large in the Israeli mindset. Among some circles – both in the political leadership and in the military – the events also reignited a pre-existing messianic worldview, and they began seeing the horrific attack of October 7th as an opportunity to reoccupy Gaza, and moreover, to deport its Palestinian inhabitants.
- Israel unleashed in this war (almost?) any inhibitions it may have had, and there is no doubt that war crimes on a massive scale have been propagated by the Israeli military.
- However, what was done in the initial stages of the war pales in comparison to what happened later, after Israel violated the ceasefire and resumed fighting. At this stage, it was already clear that the government and the army were acting out of dubious motives, aiming to promote the takeover of the Gaza Strip, the imposition of military rule there, the expulsion of the Palestinian residents, and Jewish settlement.

The Black Flag Action Group

- At this stage, many of us felt that silence was no longer possible in the face of the war crimes being committed in our names.
- We initiated an open letter to the heads of Israeli academia, calling on them to act to stop the war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza.
- The call was phrased in a strong language, and its critical stance deviates from what is customary in Israeli public discourse during times of war. Nevertheless, it swept along large segments of academia. Within a few days, no less than 1,400 lecturers from all academic institutions in Israel signed the letter.
- The letter declared it is high time to "raise a black flag" and to sound a clear voice against war crimes such as indiscriminate killing, starvation, and mass expulsion of civilians.
- It should perhaps be explained that in the Israeli context, the term "black flag" expresses a "patently illegal order" – an order that must not be executed, and that soldiers – as well as civilians – are obligated to refuse.

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- In addition to the open letter, we took it upon ourselves to act to raise a voice of protest and to spark discussion – in academia but also in broader Israeli society – against Israel's actions in Gaza.
- In many academic institutions, various activities took place: rallies and demonstrations, where we raised black flags and displayed photos of children killed in Gaza; various protest activities such as die-ins, discussion events, and readings of testimonies, among others.



Die-in in Tel Aviv University



- Unfortunately, this extensive activity was curtailed, largely due to the war with Iran that has been raging until a few days ago. Meanwhile, the semester in Israeli academic institutions has also ended, so currently, to a large extent, we have shifted our activities to Zoom and webinars.
- In recent weeks, various activities have been taking place in this sphere, such as the "Eyes on Gaza" initiative that emerged from the University of Haifa: daily 20-minute meetings where we explore various aspects of the war.



The Black Flag in Academia action group invites you to an emergency meeting about the Gaza Humanitarian Fund (GHF) distribution centers, to be conducted **tomorrow, Thursday July 3, at 9:00 PM Israel/Palestine Time**: How did GHF become almost exclusively responsible for distributing humanitarian aid in Gaza? Why did its distribution centers become death traps for hundreds of Palestinian civilians? What are the implications of their model of activity for humanitarian aid in Gaza and in general? And how do they serve Israel's policy in the Gaza Strip? We will discuss these questions with scholars and leading field- and policy-officials from aid organizations: Liat Kozma, Hebrew University; Gadi Algazi, Tel Aviv University; Keren Shavit, Physicians for Human Rights; Bushra Khalidi, Oxfam.