

To Ms. Federica Mogherini - High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
To Mr Carlos Moedas - European Commission, DG for Research and Innovation

Re: Letter from European researchers and academics concerning Israel's participation in Horizon Europe

Dear Ms. Federica Mogherini,
Dear Mr. Moedas,

We researchers and academics from Europe are writing to you in order to express our deep concern about the participation of Israel and its military companies in EU Research Programs. While we write, new Israeli raids flare up and the smoldering remnant of Gaza protesters of the Great March of Return, already forgotten and forsaken. More than 270 unarmed civilians were killed during the March of return, including women, children and persons with disabilities and thousands more were injured [28.939, of whom 7.247 by live fire]¹. They were only demanding their rights enshrined in international law: end of the illegal blockade and for the right of return to their ancestral homes from which they were expelled.

A report of the United Nation's Independent Commission of Inquiry published earlier this year concluded that the Israeli army might have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity by indiscriminately killing health workers, journalists and unarmed protesters who did not pose any imminent threats to the soldiers².

Relentless violence rages again after 11 years of inhumane siege and three military assaults that shattered the fabric of normal life. Gaza is declared to be uninhabitable by 2020 according to a report by the UN³, but this "environmentally defined" deadline reflects only the intentionality of an imposed series of emergencies, followed each time by a further decrease in health, energy, food independence and commerce after each episode of armed aggression since 2007.

The hermetic siege combined with the systematic large scale military destruction is slowly strangling nearly the two million inhabitants of Gaza. None of the basic civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and power plants, was ever sufficiently rebuilt after each of the three military assaults due to severe restrictions by the blockade. Electricity is available only a few hours a day, 98% of water is not drinkable, and many hospitals periodically stop functioning due to lack of medication, spare parts of machinery, electricity and fuel. Permission for patients to leave in order to receive life-saving treatment elsewhere has been continually declining in time. Tools for education, number of teachers, and rebuilding of schools are severely impaired. The inhabitants of Gaza have been consistently denied basic human rights and human dignity.

The disproportionate use of force on the civilians amounting to war crimes has also been systematic throughout all, long and short term, military operations, including the almost daily assaults to fishermen and agricultural workers.

These facts have been meticulously documented in authoritative reports by the UN⁴ and human rights organizations^{5,6} and widely condemned by the international community. Yet Israel's policies of aggression and repression have continued.

This ongoing impunity is allowing Gaza, the world's largest open air prison, to be used as a military test-field. In each offensive Israel deployed, tested and perfected new high-tech military weapons and surveillance systems⁷. These new cutting edge high-tech products are exhibited and sold as "battle-tested", an exclusive label Israeli home land security industry boasts. Israel became the world's top arms exporter per capita⁸. This grave violation of human rights is thus highly profitable for Israel's war industry-disclosing an other side of the claim of "only self-defense" and the interests beyond the lack of measure in the aggressions on Palestinians of Gaza.

Nonetheless, in spite of continual and serious breaches of international law and violation of human rights, and regardless of the commitment for upholding human rights of European countries, Israel enjoys an exceptionally privileged status in dealing with Europe also through the Association Agreement and has been receiving grants from the European Commission in the area of research and innovation (FP7 and its successor Horizon 2020).

Funds are granted even to Israeli arms producers such as Elbit Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries Ltd. (IAI), the producers of lethal drones that were used in the Gaza military assaults against civilians ^{4,5}, together with numerous academic institutions that have close ties with Israeli military industry.

We appeal to the European Union to impose a-comprehensive military embargo on Israel, as long as Israel continues to blatantly violate-human rights. We are deeply disturbed that public funds contributed by European tax payers are channeled to a country that not only disregards human rights but also uses most advanced knowledge and technology for the very violation of human rights. **We believe that knowledge and innovation should serve progress in humanity and society, not to develop dual use or military research of a country that has a record history of grave human rights violations.** This is not compatible with the values Europe upholds.

In 2017 more than 150 European trade unions, political parties, human rights organizations and faith groups from over 16 European countries issued a call urging the EU to uphold its legal responsibilities and exclude Israeli military companies from EU Framework Programs ⁸.

We support Amnesty International call for a military embargo on Israel issued last year following the attacks on the unarmed protesters of the Great March of Return using maiming bullets and brutal means by the Israeli army, unnecessary in that context ^{4,9}.

Youth of Gaza appealed to you to stop funding Israeli manufacturers of weapons and surveillance system that guard their open-air prison, maimed them and destroyed their future ¹⁰. In support of their outcry we call upon European Union and European Commission to suspend the Association Agreement with Israel and exclude Israel as an eligible partner for Horizon Europe (successor of Horizon 2020), as long as it refuses to comply with the rules of international law. We also share the concern of B'Tselem, Israeli human rights organization, which stated "If the international community does not come to its senses and force Israel to abide by the rules that are binding to every state in the world, it will pull the rug out from under the global effort to protect human rights in the post-WWII era." ¹¹

Signatories:*

Dr. Nozomi Takahashi, Center for Inflammation Research, VIB-Ghent University, Belgium
Prof. Marc Van Ranst, Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Transplantation, KU Leuven, Belgium

Dr. Leander Meuris, Medical Biotechnology, VIB-Ghent University, Belgium
Prof. Tarek Meguid,

Prof. Em. John Dugard, Universities of Leiden and the Witwatersrand (UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2001-2008)

** Institutions are added for identification purposes only. All signatories have signed the letter in personal capacity*

References:

- 1 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-snapshot-casualties-context-demonstrations-and-hostilities-gaza-30-mar-2018-22>
- 2 Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory - A/HRC/40/74
- 3 <https://unctad.org/en/Pages/PressRelease.aspx?OriginalVersionID=260>
- 4 Report of the detailed findings of the independent commission of inquiry established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1- A/HRC/29/CRP.
- 5 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/032/2014/en/>
- 6 https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iopt0609webwcover_0.pdf
- 7 <https://electronicintifada.net/content/gaza-laboratory-boosts-profits-israels-war-industry/25636>
- 8 <http://www.eccpalestine.org/european-trade-unions-political-parties-human-rights-organisationsand-faith-groups-call-on-the-eu-to-stop-its-support-to-israeli-military-companies/>
- 9 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/israel-arms-embargo-needed-as-military-unlawfully-kills-and-maims-gaza-protesters/>
- 10 <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-Tg71PKoPC2dsenUe3d0aqyrgYewGxb6-6aqaKJ3FkY/edit?usp=sharing>
- 11 https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/201804_if_the_heart_be_not_callous_eng.pdf