



# **Challenging the Anti-Israel "Scholasticide" Accusation**

# Challenging the Anti-Israel "Scholasticide" Accusation

In recent years, the obscure term "scholasticide" has emerged as a key and highly contested anti-Israel accusation. It refers to the unsubstantiated charge that Israel's military actions are deliberately intended to destroy Palestinian educational institutions with the goal of erasing Palestinian history, culture, and intellectual life.

Since October 7, 2023, the accusation has featured in numerous campus events and protests nationwide and in programs, statements, and resolutions fielded by professional academic associations.<sup>1</sup> The claim has also increasingly been used by anti-Israel groups and activists to justify academic boycotts of Israeli universities and scholars.

This ADL/AEN resource provides background information regarding the "scholasticide" charge, including its origins and the effort by radical anti-Israel advocates to promote it after October 7, 2023 as a means of discrediting Israel. The resource also provides a brief overview of the central criticisms that have been leveled against the accusation by leading academics in our networks as well as other scholars and practitioners.

ADL and AEN are committed to open inquiry and academic freedom in researching controversial political issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In offering this resource, ADL and AEN hope to encourage factually grounded studies of the "scholasticide" claim. Our view is that such analyses should generate a robust and reasoned discourse centering on comprehensive and evidence-based accounts of the conflict. Scholars should reject accounts that rely on a simplistic narrative that villainizes Israel as a uniquely malicious aggressor while neglecting the realities of urban warfare and the actions of Hamas and other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) held a webinar on the topic of "Scholasticide in Palestine" in March 2025 which was criticized by the ADL, AEN, and other organizations for promoting a one-sided narrative that perpetuated falsehoods and demonized Israel. See: (2025) Letter to American Association of University Professors over 'Scholasticide in Palestine' Webinar. Available at: <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/letter-american-association-university-professors-over-scholasticide>

# The Origins of the “Scholasticide” Accusation

The term “scholasticide” refers to the systematic and severe destruction of educational institutions and infrastructure. A portmanteau of the Latin words for school and killing, it was reportedly coined in 2009 during Israel’s Operation Cast Lead by former PLO official and Palestinian political scientist Karma Nabulsi. At the time, Nabulsi asserted that the “systematic destruction of Palestinian education by Israel has countered that tradition since the occupation of 1967.”<sup>2</sup> However, the term remained relatively obscure until Israel’s military campaign in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attacks.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2024, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) issued a press release titled “UN experts deeply concerned over ‘scholasticide’ in Gaza.”<sup>4</sup> Several months later, a report by UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese further accused Israel of “domicide, urbicide, scholasticide, medicide, cultural genocide, and ecocide.”<sup>5</sup> Various vehemently anti-Israel groups and organizations have further disseminated the “scholasticide” charge, launching a cross-disciplinary global campaign to reach educational institutions and urge academics to take action.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that unlike “genocide,” the term “scholasticide” does not have any standing in international law and does not appear in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Moreover, while the UDHR Article 26 establishes a universal “right to education,” it also requires that such education “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”<sup>7, 8</sup>

Some educational institutions and infrastructure, such as libraries, museums, and archives, fall within the scope of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Article 1). However, Article 8 establishes that the granting of this special protection for cultural property does not apply when it is used for military purposes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmad, A. and Vulliamy, E. (2009) Attacks on school in Gaza, The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/10/gaza-schools>

<sup>3</sup> A search for “scholasticide” in Google Scholar yields no results prior to this date.

<sup>4</sup> (2024) UN experts deeply concerned over ‘scholasticide’ in Gaza. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>

<sup>5</sup> Albanese, F. (2024) Genocide as colonial erasure, United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/genocide-as-colonial-erasure-report-francesca-albanese-01oct24/>

<sup>6</sup> Scholars against the war on Palestine (no date) Scholars Against War. Available at: <https://www.scholarsagainstarwar.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Universal declaration of human rights (no date) United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>8</sup> Several recent studies have documented how Gaza’s educational system denies academic freedom rights to Palestinian students and researchers and fails to fulfil these UDHR directives. See, for example: (2025) Back to School: Gaza’s Educational Frameworks in the Shadow of War. Available at: <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Gazas-Educational-Frameworks.pdf> and Nelson, C. (2021) Not in Kansas Anymore, Academic Engagement Network. Available at: <https://academicengagement.org/not-in-kansas-anymore/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-regulations-execution-convention>. Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention (1954) UNESCO.org. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-regulations-execution-convention>

# The “Scholasticide” Accusation in Professional Academic Associations

While the “scholasticide” charge has been the focus of various events on campus and has featured in numerous recent writings and talks by anti-Israel scholars and activists, the “scholasticide” campaign has largely centered on professional academic associations, where it has been packaged into statements and resolutions promoted by anti-Israel activists and groups.

In January 2025, a majority of members at the annual Business Meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA), the oldest and largest body of professional historians in the nation, passed a “Resolution to Oppose Scholasticide in Gaza.”<sup>10</sup> The AHA Council subsequently vetoed the resolution on the grounds that it fell outside the scope of the organization’s mission.<sup>11</sup> The activist group “Historians for Peace and Democracy” (HPAD) mobilized the campaign at the AHA and reintroduced and passed a similar resolution at the 2026 business meeting, which the AHA Council vetoed once again.<sup>12, 13</sup>

However, the leadership at the Organization of American Historians (OAH), the largest professional association for scholars of American history, affirmed the same resolution which passed at its annual Business Meeting.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

Other organizations, such as the Middle East Studies Association,<sup>17, 18</sup> American Library Association,<sup>19</sup> and the World History Association,<sup>20</sup> have issued similar statements. Many of these documents invoke the UN OHCHR statement. At these and other professional academic associations, panels, webinars, and other programs promote the charge despite the fact that it has not been subjected to any rigorous empirical investigation.

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the number of votes in favor (428) represented less than 4% of the association’s total membership of around 11,000.

<sup>11</sup> AHA Business Meeting Resolution Update (2025) AHA. Available at: <https://www.historians.org/news/business-meeting-resolution-update/>

<sup>12</sup> Resolution in Solidarity with Gaza (2025) Historians for Peace and Democracy. Available at: <https://www.historiansforpeace.org/>

<sup>13</sup> AHA Council Letter to Members (2026) AHA. Available at: <https://www.historians.org/news/aha-council-letter-to-members-january-2026/>

<sup>14</sup> Here, too, those voting in favor (104) represented a distinct minority - less than 2% of OAH’s total membership of around 6,000.

<sup>15</sup> Organization of American Historians votes to condemn Israeli ‘scholasticide’ in Gaza (2025) Middle East Eye. Available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/organisation-american-historians-votes-condemn-israeli-scholasticide-gaza>

<sup>16</sup> Gosse, V. (2025) Challenging the Silence Over Palestine in the American Historical Association, The Nation. Available at: <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/palestine-israel-gaza-genocide-complicity/>

<sup>17</sup> Palestine-based initiatives Technical Education Support for Higher Education Students and Rebuilding Hope (2024) Middle East Studies Association. Available at: <https://mesana.org/awards/awardee/mesa-academic-freedom-award/palestine-based-initiativetechnical-education-support-for-higher-education-students-and-rebuilding-hope>

<sup>18</sup> The Emergency Committee of Universities in Gaza and the Isnad program of the Welfare Association (Taawon) (2025) Middle East Studies Association. Available at: <https://mesana.org/awards/awardee/mesa-academic-freedom-award/the-emergency-committee-of-universities-in-gaza-and-the-isanad-program-of-the-welfare-association-taawon>

<sup>19</sup> Resolution on Damage and Destruction of Libraries and other Cultural Institutions (2024) ALA. Available at: <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/resolution-damage-and-destruction-libraries-and-other-cultural-institutions>

<sup>20</sup> (2025) Resolution Opposing Scholasticide in Gaza. Available at: <https://members.thewha.org/page/resolution>

# "Scholasticide": A False and Harmful Accusation

The charge that Israel has perpetrated "scholasticide" fails to meet standards of academic integrity; alienates Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli scholars from academic communities; and undermines the mission of professional academic associations, placing them at risk by potentially exposing them to legal, financial, and reputational harm.

The charge omits crucial context and severely distorts the reality of counter-terror operations. Those currently making the accusation point to widespread destruction of educational infrastructure in Gaza during Israel-Hamas war from 2023-2025, often citing lists of destroyed universities and researchers killed, without noting that Hamas and other terrorist groups use these educational facilities as military bases and recruiting grounds.

There is significant empirical evidence and documentation of Hamas hiding its military assets and personnel in hospitals, mosques, and schools, thereby using civilian infrastructure and those who work, pray, and study within them as human shields. International law, including the Hague convention noted above, allows for military action in such scenarios; otherwise, law-abiding states would not be able to effectively combat terrorism.<sup>21</sup>

The destruction of educational infrastructure during warfare is tragic, and helping to rebuild these institutions in Gaza and to reconstitute library collections and archival materials is a laudable goal. But there is as yet no empirical evidence or definitive proof that Israel has intentionally sought to destroy Gaza's educational system or eradicate "Palestinian historical memory." No such Israeli government or military policy to wipe out Palestinian education and culture has been provided by those championing the "scholasticide" accusation. As historian Jeffrey Herf has noted:

"Exculpating Hamas for the destruction of educational institutions in Gaza during a war that it started and refuses to end serves neither peace nor democracy. It simply aids the strategy of a terrorist organization that believes Palestinian life is expendable in pursuit of its eliminationist goals."<sup>22</sup>

During the recent Israel-Hamas war, when Israel targeted civilian infrastructure, it reportedly did so based on actionable intelligence, such as verified evidence of Hamas command centers embedded in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) facilities. Numerous sources have documented how UNRWA educational infrastructure and dozens of the agency's employees directly

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<sup>21</sup> Spencer, J. (2026) The Genocide Slur Is Not Just for Jews. Available at: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/genocide-slur-israel-us-military>

<sup>22</sup> Herf, J. (2025) Agitprop at the AHA, Quillette. Available at: <https://quillette.com/2025/01/15/agitprop-at-the-aha-scholasticide-hamas-antisemitism/>

enabled Hamas' actions.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup> The same holds true for Palestinian institutions of higher education in Gaza; for example, on October 11th, 2023, the IDF claimed that it bombed the Islamic University of Gaza, which materially supported Hamas' operations.<sup>26, 27</sup> The omission of the fact that Hamas operates from within civilian and educational institutions undermines the credibility of the "scholasticide" accusation and patently ignores the complexity of urban warfare.

At the same time, Hamas' attack also resulted in the damage of Israeli educational infrastructure, a fact ignored by those promoting the "scholasticide" accusation. October 7 and its aftermath have taken a profound toll on Israeli academia, including the murder and abduction of faculty, the suspension of research and teaching as the country mobilized for war, and the trauma on students and survivors. For example, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev lost 54 staff and students who were murdered in Hamas' attacks.<sup>28</sup> Many other Israeli universities and colleges also experienced the traumatic loss of faculty and students; schools in the northern and southern parts of the country also faced lengthy disruptions of teaching and research during the war.

Moreover, it is also important to note that the term "scholasticide" has been applied almost exclusively to Israel. A troubling double standard is clearly apparent, as other attacks on educational infrastructure during warfare have not resulted in the same degree of outcry or condemnations. For example, Iran was not similarly accused when two of its ballistic missiles struck Israel's Weizmann Institute of Science in June 2025, causing extensive damage and destruction to over 50 laboratories as well as disrupting its operations. Nor has a "scholasticide" accusation been levelled at Russia, despite the fact that its military attacks have forced the closure of schools.<sup>29, 30, 31</sup>

The "scholasticide" accusation is fully aligned with the goals of the global BDS movement, which has long sought to cast Israel as a pariah and outlaw state within the academy. The goal of BDS is to delegitimize the Israeli state and society through anti-normalization campaigns. These efforts, including the current "scholasticide" campaign, unfairly demonize Israel and by their effect and consequence contribute to the alienation of Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli members within scholarly communities.<sup>32, 33</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Israel's military campaign followed Hamas' violation of a cease-fire agreement to invade Israel in a surprise attack. The horrific massacre of over 1,200 people on October 7, 2023 along with the abduction of 251 hostages was the worst instance of the mass murder of Jews on a single day since the Holocaust.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) (2025) ADL. Available at: <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/united-nations-relief-and-works-agency-palestinian-refugees-unrwa>

<sup>25</sup> (2025) The Connection Between UNRWA and Hamas in Gaza. Available at: <https://govextra.gov.il/media/d21mw2f3/the-connection-between-unrwa-and-hamas-280425.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> (2020) The Islamic University of Gaza, A Hamas Stronghold, Has Been Supported by the EU for Years. Available at: [https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2020/09/Ef\\_202\\_20.pdf](https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2020/09/Ef_202_20.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> (2023) The IDF Struck an Important Hamas Operational, Political and Military Center in Gaza—the Islamic University. Available at: <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/october-23-pr/the-idf-struck-an-important-hamas-operational-political-and-military-center-in-gaza-the-islamic-university/>

<sup>28</sup> Sacerdoti, J. (2023) Israeli university which lost 54 staff and students finds a wartime role, The Jewish Chronicle. Available at: <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/israeli-university-which-lost-54-staff-and-students-finds-a-wartime-role-hh7xxiud>

<sup>29</sup> Tercatin, R. (2025) From heart tissue to DNA samples, Weizmann scientists mourn work vaporized in Iran attack. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/from-heart-tissue-to-dna-samples-weizmann-scientists-mourn-work-vaporized-in-iran-attack/>

<sup>30</sup> (2026) Russian Strikes Force Kyiv Schools to Close Amid Rolling Blackouts. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/16/world/europe/ukraine-blackouts-kyiv-school-closure.html>

<sup>31</sup> Feinman, P. (2026) Genocide and the American Historical Association. Available at: <https://ihare.org/2026/01/27/the-american-historical-association-made-the-new-york-times-again-for-the-wrong-reasons/>

<sup>32</sup> What is BDS: A guide to understanding and countering calls for divestment and boycotts (2025) ADL. Available at: <https://notoleranceforantisemitism.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/what-bds-guide-understanding-and-countering-calls-divestment-and>

<sup>33</sup> Michael B. Atkins and Miriam F. Elman, "BDS as a Threat to Academic Freedom and Campus Free Speech in the United States," *Michigan State International Law Review*, 2021, Vol. 29(2): 213-259. Available at <https://aenetwork.app.box.com/s/ssqr3clwp7zz8l8ner5salgdizy6tcd9>

Amid rising antisemitism, inflammatory language fosters a polarizing and hostile environment. An ADL/AEN September 2025 survey found that Jewish-identifying faculty reported facing targeted boycott, smear, and doxxing campaigns from fellow faculty, administrators, or staff on campus, as well as in professional associations and scholarly societies.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore crucial that discussions around sensitive and controversial topics are grounded in factual evidence and presented in a manner that encourages rigorous analysis and constructive debate and dialogue.

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<sup>34</sup> Faculty Under Fire: Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Bias in Higher Education (2025) ADL/AEN. Available at: <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/faculty-under-fire-antisemitism-and-anti-israel-bias-higher-education>

# Conclusion

In order to preserve academic freedom for all their members and enable the rigorous study of contested empirical claims, scholarly societies should refrain from taking positions on contentious issues that fall outside the scope of their mission, especially ongoing geopolitical conflicts such as the Israel-Hamas war.<sup>35</sup>

When academic associations promote the charge of “scholasticide,” they deviate from their traditional missions of promoting academic freedom and upholding academic standards. At a time of increased distrust of higher education, it is vital for such organizations to focus on their core missions and to remain non-partisan.

There are many ways to support Palestinian scholars and students that do not require endorsing the divisive and discriminatory goals of the BDS movement. As noted by historian James Hankins, professional associations such as the AHA could remain mission-aligned by promoting peace and championing academic study in Gaza. They could, for example, urge the Islamic University of Gaza to “build trust with the Israelis by publicly distancing itself from Hamas and declaring that it will not allow its facilities to be used for military purposes by any armed forces, whether Palestinian or Israeli. That sort of resolution American academics might legitimately support.”<sup>36</sup>

Premature declarations risk misrepresenting events and advancing politically motivated narratives rather than upholding academic integrity. Given the complexity and evolving nature of the Middle East conflict, scholars and the disciplinary societies to which they belong should prioritize rigorous scholarly inquiry and civil discourse over rushed and biased conclusions. Doing so can promote academic exchange, further peace, and foster mutual understanding.

**Explore the [ADL/AEN Toolkit](#) and [Best Practices](#) to learn more about confronting antisemitism and anti-Israel bias in professional academic associations.**

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<sup>35</sup> Professional academic associations may comment and issue public statements on foreign or domestic matters insofar as doing so is mission-aligned and advances the interest of the discipline. For example, in 2022 the American Historical Association condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and deplored President Vladimir Putin's justification for the war as an “abuse of history” which used “outlandish” historical claims and narratives for military aggression. See: Statement condemning Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022) AHA. Available at: <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/statement-condemning-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-april-2022/>

<sup>36</sup> Hankins, J. (2025) Why I oppose the ‘scholasticide’ resolution, Compact. Available at: <https://www.compactmag.com/article/why-i-oppose-the-scholasticide-resolution/>

# About ADL

ADL is the world's leading anti-hate organization. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all. Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all.

# About AEN

AEN is a national organization that mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. More at [academicengagement.org/](https://academicengagement.org/) and [www.facultyagainstantisemitism.org/](https://www.facultyagainstantisemitism.org/).

