

Universities are failing in their duty

by Suzette Sandoz*, Lausanne



Suzette Sandoz. (Photo <https://blogs.letemps.ch/suzette-sandoz/>)

Could the cruel war between Israel and Palestine finally provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the role of universities? The rectorates are stammering and getting annoyed, students are demonstrating, the police are sometimes intervening – it's a pitiful sight.

The newspaper *Le Temps* reported on 4 June (p. 6) that "the University of Geneva is under pressure to terminate its partnerships with Israel", but specifies that "the University of Geneva is not implementing an academic boycott, as has been the case with Russia since February 2022, but is declaring that the [political situation in Israel is *de facto* undermining the existing agreements]."¹

So, there is an academic boycott of Russia and agreements with Israel that have been stripped of their substance. A subtle distinction! Instead of teaching students the ability and willingness to talk and discuss with those who think differently, the University of Geneva is teaching them exclusion, insincerity and the art of spin.

A programme for the future!!!

From the news on Thursday evening, 12 June, we learn that the University of Lausanne has yielded to the demands of the student group demonstrating for Palestine and terminated its exchange and cooperation agreement with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem "for ethical reasons"; the latter is accused of collaborating with the military in the education of some of its graduates. Probably to exonerate itself, the rect-



'Palais de Rumine', main building of the University Library in Lausanne. (Picture Guérin Nicolas/Wikipedia)

orate points out that this agreement had only enabled very few exchange programmes. What a cowardly excuse!

Teaching the art of dialogue instead of hatred and exclusion

At twenty, you are generous, spirited, a little anarchistic and very idealistic. If you are not, then you are already old. But especially academic education should help to channel this energy and enthusiasm and transform it into a positive force. Since science, whether "hard" or "soft", has only made progress through discussion and the exchange of ideas and suffers setbacks when faced with bans and censorship, universities should teach students how to interact with other people and give them the will to overcome the sterile or deadly political and military confrontations of "adults". It is precisely through idealistic young people that bridges can be built across the hatred between adults.

By bowing to public pressure to sever ties with Russian or Israeli universities, universities are punishing the civilian population and young people for the mistakes, abuses or crimes of those in power in their countries. They are helping to fuel murderous hatred and promoting vengeful exclusion.

Unlike the diplomatic world, universities do not have to act discreetly. On the contrary, they must

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loudly proclaim their desire and mission to inspire and encourage students to get to know each other and talk to each other across borders. They must dare to organise encounters and non-violent verbal exchanges and promote exchanges between countries as much as possible through their idealistic and often generous young students.

Diplomacy, on the other hand, must proceed discreetly, as it ensures negotiations between representatives of power, i.e. the state and national sensitivities. The exchange between students concerns knowledge, plans for the future, enthusiasm, hopes, perhaps even utopias. There should not yet be a paralysing past, or if there already is one, the university has a duty to prevent it from becoming a cause of isolation and death.

By terminating its partnerships in Israel and boycotting its academic relations with Russia, the University of Geneva has betrayed its mission under the influence of political propaganda. The University of Lausanne has followed suit regarding Israel (did it do so previously about Russia? I have not had the opportunity to check). These two institutions, which should be working to shape the future, have done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the peoples at war (Ukrainians, Russians, Palestinians, Israelis) or to build a bridge to peace. They have merely promoted revenge and exclusionary practices, thereby violating their own credo. This is very regrettable.

Source: <https://www.limpertinentmedia.com/post/les-universites-infideles-a-leur-mission>, 15 June 2025

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ The part in brackets is a quote from the article.