

Belgium's Ghent University cuts academic relationship with all Israeli universities

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Brussels, June 1 (RHC)-- One of the major universities in Belgium has broken off relationship with all Israeli universities and research institutions which it says no longer align with its human rights policy.

University of Ghent (UGent) said in a statement that an investigation by the public research center highlighted concerns regarding connections between Israeli academic institutions and the Israeli administration, military, or security services.

UGent had 18 ongoing partnerships with Israeli academic institutions, it added

The investigation also referenced a recent World Court ruling which ordered Israel to halt its offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah and withdraw from the besieged territory, in a case brought by South Africa saying Israel is committing genocide in the narrow Strip.

The development comes two weeks after UGent announced in a statement that it was severing ties with three Israeli educational and research institutions. The university's rector, Rik Van de Walle, said at the time that ties were being cut with Holon Institute of Technology, MIGAL Galilee Research Institute and the Volcani Centre, which carries out agricultural research.

"We currently assess these three partners as (very) problematic according to the Ghent University human rights test, in contrast to the positive evaluation we gave these partners at the start of our collaboration," Van de Walle said.

Partnerships with MIGAL Galilee Research Institute and the Volcani Centre "were no longer desirable" due to their affiliation with Israeli ministries, an investigation by the University of Ghent found, and collaboration with the Holon Institute "was problematic" because it provided material support to the army for actions in Gaza.

A spokesperson for the university said the move would affect four projects.

Anti-war protesters in Ghent have been demonstrating and occupying parts of the university campus since early May protesting against the Israeli regime's military onslaught in Gaza killing nearly 36,400 Palestinians so far.

The protesters told Belgian broadcaster VRT they welcomed the decision, but want to see it extended to include the six non-academic Israeli institutions that UGent currently partners with.

Earlier this week, two other Belgian universities announced changes in their partnership with Israeli institutions.

The University of Antwerp said it would continue its ongoing research projects with Israeli educational institutions, but will put new projects on hold.

The Université Libre de Bruxelles announced that it will no longer initiate projects with Israeli partners.

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