

A STATEMENT REGARDING GAZA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE.

As an institution dedicated to the investigation, dissemination and celebration of the cultural heritage of the region, we condemn the wholesale destruction taking place in the Gaza Strip, in contravention of international conventions protecting cultural heritage in times of war.

Our ethical policy (<https://www.pef.org.uk/about/ethical-policy/ethical-policy/>) makes it clear that the PEF does not support, encourage, fund or publish research into items that have been transported or appropriated, or may reasonably be suspected of having been unlawfully handled. We view reports of any individual or organ of the State of Israel engaging in the removal of the cultural heritage of the Gaza Strip with great concern. The cultural heritage of the Gaza Strip is the birthright of the Gazan people, and all parties engaged in hostilities have a moral and legal duty to ensure this legacy is protected and remains in the Gaza Strip. Recognising this, our current policy is to reject papers submitted to the PEQ and PEF Annual series that include material that contravenes international conventions. We have a moral duty to uphold international law in relation to antiquities which have been removed, sold, or appropriated from any country or region, including Gaza, and would ask our colleagues to work with us to help protect and respect Gaza's antiquities.

Gaza's intellectual infrastructure has been completely destroyed, alongside hospitals, schools, churches and mosques. The last standing university, Al Israa, was demolished on the 16th of January by the IDF. We deplore the destruction of civilian targets, including academic institutions, and call for the relentless campaign to cease.

The loss of life in both Gaza and Israel is an unspeakable tragedy. We are greatly saddened by the loss of Israeli colleagues who may have been killed or taken hostage in the Hamas attacks of October 2023.

We are equally saddened by the news that scores of Palestinian academics and scholarly professionals in Gaza have been killed during this conflict. In both cases, their right to work and conduct research in peace has been obliterated. We join those calling for an immediate ceasefire to stop the killing and the destruction of cultural heritage. In the light of recent reports on the status of cultural heritage in Gaza, we encourage all scholars and academic institutions interested in the region, on all sides of the conflict, to join in the efforts to rebuild the cultural heritage of Gaza and its universities once hostilities are over and to return objects that have been removed without the consent of the people of the Gaza Strip to whom it belongs. It will not be a quick process, but our collective action or inaction will have profound consequences for this and coming generations for decades to come. As scholars, we should not turn away from the intellectual death of an entire region, but work together to bring it back to life.

We look forward to a future of peace for all in the region and we hope that all parties will contribute to the rebuilding of material and intellectual life of the region that has been so comprehensively destroyed.