

# Open letter to Mark Scott from USyd staff and students – do not allow Israeli Defense Force members to justify genocide on our campus

Dear Professor Scott,

As students and staff at the University of Sydney, we write urgently to express our grave concerns with respect to an upcoming event being held on campus on Wednesday April 2. The organisations 'Stand with Us Australia' and 'Israel-IS' have announced an event called "Shared Stories – Interfaith Voices for a Cohesive Future". The event involves a panel discussion and a virtual reality experience of October 7th. To this event at the university, Stand with Us is bringing three speakers who have worked in the Israel Defense Forces, including one who is noted as having "fought in the Gaza envelope on October 7th".

We are horrified that this event is being held on campus. In 2024, the [International Court of Justice](#) found that Israel's conduct in Gaza is plausibly genocidal. UN [Special Rapporteurs](#) and a [UN Special Commission of Inquiry](#) have since found that Israel is engaged in genocidal acts, and human rights NGOs including [Amnesty International](#) have concluded that Israel is indeed committing genocide in Gaza. In 2024, the [International Criminal Court](#) issued arrest warrants for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Gaza. It is shocking that personnel from a military that established legal and human rights organisations contend is currently committing genocide should be invited onto campus at the University of Sydney.

We fear that this event will be used to generate support for the Israel Defense Forces and its genocidal campaign in Gaza. "Stand with Us" produces materials (labelled 'fact sheets') that use the language of 'ethics' to sanitise actions of the [IDF](#) and reject all allegations of war crimes and use of disproportionate force. Its materials dismiss the weight of opinion in the human rights community, arguing that "[influential NGOs have unfortunately succumbed to prejudice](#)". An organisation that exists to raise support for a foreign military that stands widely accused of genocide has no place on a university campus. Its presence entails significant risks of "[direct and public incitement to commit genocide](#)", which is punishable under the United Nations Genocide Convention. The university has a legal obligation to ensure that such genocidal incitement does not take place on its campus.

It is particularly galling that an event hosted by organisations that glorify this military campaign and that involves military personnel who participated in it could be justified as a contribution to campus 'diversity' or "social cohesion". Many staff and students, and particularly Palestinian, Arab and Muslim staff and students, are deeply distressed by Israel's military campaign in Gaza, which has now killed more than 50,000 people in Gaza. Israel has unilaterally ended the ceasefire in Gaza, and is conducting daily massacres of civilians while blocking the entry of all aid, engaging in the war crime of starving civilians. Our university has many staff and students with families in Lebanon and Syria, who have also been affected by Israel's illegal incursions into these countries, which have resulted in mass casualties, and destruction of property and livelihoods.

To be clear, our opposition to this event is not a rejection of academic freedom or freedom of speech. We defend the academic and intellectual freedom of University of Sydney staff members and we welcome members of civil society onto campus to participate in open debate. This freedom does not extend to external groups working with a foreign military to provide propaganda in support of an active genocide. This is particularly true when those same groups have campaigned to [restrict the academic freedom of critics of Israel's genocide](#), and to suppress student dissent. They should hold their event somewhere else.

We also note that, while the event is billed as an "interfaith" event to foster social cohesion, the organisation hosting it has held events that [deny the existence of Palestinians](#) and has produced [a comic book](#) that depicts supporters of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign as venomous snakes in the colour of the Palestinian flag. We note that depicting targeted groups as vermin or venomous creatures is a well-documented tool used by genocidal regimes. The "Stand with Us" website also depicts those who have spoken out against Israel's devastation in Gaza as running "[campaigns of hate](#)".

This event is clearly at odds with the values of respect, non-harassment and antiracism that the University of Sydney claims to espouse. It is clear that this event is designed to glorify a foreign military and delegitimise those who speak out against its war crimes and crimes against humanity. Allowing this event to proceed undermines the campus safety to which the University of Sydney claims to be committed. It must not proceed.

**We write to ask that you act swiftly to cancel the StandWithUs event and to disallow any event that brings IDF soldiers to campus, celebrates those accused of war crimes, or gives a platform for militarism.**

Sincerely,