



The Islamic University of Gaza, A Hamas Stronghold, Has Been Supported by the EU for Years

September 10, 2020

Overview¹

The Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) is a radical Islamist academic institution which has been a Hamas stronghold since its founding. Generations of Hamas' military and political leadership grew out of the university, and Hamas holds political, ideological and military activities within its walls. The IUG has enjoyed EU support for many years, manifested by integrating the university into EU-funded projects and the exchanges of students and faculty, even though the EU regards Hamas as a terrorist organization. The EU support for the IUG is part of its support for Palestine, that is, the Palestinian Authority (PA). The EU has a representative in Ramallah through whom support is transferred to the IUG, although it is aware that in reality the PA has no real influence on what happens inside the university.



The Islamic University of Gaza (Islamic University Facebook page)

The Islamic University's Identification with Hamas

- The Islamic University refers to itself as an independent academic institution supervised by the PA's ministry of higher education. However, in reality it is a radical Islamist institution which has been controlled by Hamas since its founding, and the supervision of the PA's ministry of higher education is nominal at best.

¹ The full document is available in Hebrew on the ITIC website. The English version is being translated and will soon be available on the website.

- Since the university's founding, **a great deal information has been compiled about Hamas' extensive political, ideological and military activities**: senior Hamas figures, including senior operatives in Hamas' military-terrorist wing, have held **teaching or administrative positions at the IUG**; its students **have been recruited into Hamas' military wing** and have participated in terrorist attacks against Israel, including **suicide bombing attacks**; the university facilities **were exploited for developing and storing weapons**; since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 there have been riots between **Hamas operatives, who turned the university into a military compound**, and Fatah operatives. On December 28, 2008, **during Operation Cast Lead**, Israeli aircraft attacked Hamas' center for weapons development, located in the faculty of science laboratories' building.
- The following are Hamas' main Hamas movement-related political and propaganda, ideological and military activities in the university, based on information acquired about Hamas' activities since the takeover of the Gaza Strip (for further information see Appendices A and B):
 - ◆ **Political activities:** The Islamic University is where generations of Hamas political and military leadership grew and developed, and where their radical Islamist worldviews and ideology were formed. Many senior Hamas figures, past and present, including senior figures in its military wing, began their activities at the university as administrators, teachers, and activists in Hamas' student cell (the Islamic Bloc). For example, **Isma'il Haniyeh**, head of Hamas' political bureau, studied Arabic literature and was formerly secretary of the university's board of trustees and chairman of the student council. **Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahar**, one of Hamas' founders, taught medicine at the university. Senior terrorist operatives in Hamas' military wing who were killed in IDF targeted killings, such as **Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh and Salah Shehadeh**, were employed by the university. **Yahya al-Sinwar**, currently head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, studied at the university and was one of the founders of the Hamas Islamic Bloc (See Appendix B). **Dr. Abu Obeida Hafez al-Agha**, active in Hamas' finances, was **head of the university's supervisory board**. The American Treasury Department imposed sanctions on him for his involvement in the transfer of millions of dollars to Hamas (September 10, 2015).
 - ◆ **Ideological activities:** Hamas carries out **extensive indoctrination at the university to inculcate students with its radical Islamist ideology, which has its origins in Muslim**

Brotherhood ideology. The main tenets of Hamas' ideology, inculcated at the IUG, are hatred for Israel, hostility to the West and adherence to jihad. The university held conferences dealing with imposing its radical Islamic code on the residents of the Gaza Strip (for example, including intensive Qur'an studies in the educational system and the use of the media to make radical Islam more influential within the Gazan population). An examination of academic theses indicates they deal with aspects of "jihadi education," such as teaching "jihadist education" in Palestinian schools and ways to use Islamic women to deepen "jihadist education" at home. One thesis dealt with obvious anti-Semitic themes (See **Appendices A and B**).

◆ **Military activities:** According to intelligence information revealed at the time by the ITIC in response to the Goldstone Report,² the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, made extensive use of IUG facilities. Hamas **exploited its laboratories for developing and manufacturing weapons, including long-range rockets.** The activities were supported by students and lecturers, who were used as sources of knowhow. Hamas sent students involved in rocket development to Iran, Syria and Lebanon for advanced training. The IUG facilities were used to store weapons and served as covert meeting places for military wing operatives. **Many IUG students were recruited into the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' ranks** and participated in military-terrorist activities, including suicide bombing attacks (See **Appendix A**).

² For further information, see the March 2010 bulletin, the ITIC response to the Goldstone Report: "Hamas and the Terrorist Threat from the Gaza Strip The Main Findings of the Goldstone Report Versus the Factual Findings," p. 191 ff. (Response to the Goldstone Report)



Masked Palestinians, apparently Hamas operatives, and two children holding toy guns went on stage during a ceremony honoring outstanding IUG students. The masked men held a banner with a picture of Muhammad Deif, head of Hamas' military wing, who was seriously injured in an attempted IDF targeted killing attack. Muhammad Deif was an IUG graduate and during his studies was an activist in Hamas' student cell (Islamic Bloc). The picture on the banner is apparently from his days as a student (YouTube, May 11, 2015).

EU Support for the Islamic University

The IUG has participated in projects with more than 130 European universities and research centers in EU 21 countries. There are more than 40 multilateral and bilateral EU-funded programs, including Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+, Al Mqadisi (France), Appear (Austria) and Horizon 2020 (See **Appendix C**).



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International Cooperation

-Currently, IUG has project partnerships with more than 130 European universities and research centers located in 21 EU countries as part of its participation in more than 40 EU-funded multilateral and bilateral programmes including Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+, Al Mqadisi (France), Appear (Austria) and Horizon 2020.

Project partnerships between the IUG and EU universities and research centers
(IUG website, August 2020).

- Most of the EU support is transmitted to the IUG through the Erasmus+ project by Dr. Nidal al-Jayousi, whose office is in Ramallah. He is the director of the Palestine program and also responsible for its implementation in the Gaza Strip. Among the IUG projects' supporters are the World Bank and various UN agencies such as the UN Development Program (UNDP), the W.H.O., UNRWA and UNICEF (Islamic University publications, 2017).

► The EU plan for its activities in 2017 included funding for Palestine, paid through the EU's general budget and mentioned funding for the IUG (as part of the Business Start-up Incubators Program project). The money was transferred through the PA's ministry of national economy even though the EU was aware that the ministry of national economy (MoNE)'s "capacity to influence the situation in the Gaza Strip was limited due to the control of the *de facto* [Hamas] government."

Sustainable Economic Development: The technical and business capacities of Gazan entrepreneurs and their access to finance are limited, especially for women and youth. There are a number of dynamic business incubators/accelerators in the Gaza Strip and there is scope to reinforce their capacities by increasing their exposure to international best practices. The Islamic University of Gaza, notably, has been supported by the on-going EU funded "Start-up Business Incubators in Palestine" project and proved to be a solid partner. This new action would continue to work with the University and support additional incubators in the Gaza Strip. The Ministry of National Economy (MoNE)'s capacity to influence the situation in the Gaza Strip is currently limited due to the control of the *de facto* Government. However, the Ministry will be involved in the overall monitoring of the action. The project team will closely co-ordinate with civil society organisations (business development organisations, trade unions and employers' organisations, chambers of commerce, women and youth support organisations), relevant projects, universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection as well as with financial institutions and investors. The Belgium Technical Co-operation (BTC) is a frequent and reliable implementing partner of the EUREP, with assignments going beyond the currently on-going above mentioned Start-up Business Incubators project.

EU support for the IUG as part of its project for supporting Palestine in 2017
 (EU website, December 11, 2017) (ITIC underlining).

Appendices

► Appendix A: The Islamic University of Gaza as an institution identified with Hamas

- ◆ Historical background
- ◆ Importance of the university in Hamas' perspective
- ◆ The Islamic University as a Hamas military stronghold during its takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007
 - ◆ IDF attack on Hamas' center for the research and development of weapons in the science faculty building (end of 2008)
 - ◆ IUG indoctrination of students
 - ◆ Recruiting students to carry out suicide bombing attacks
 - ◆ Turkish support for the Islamic University

► Appendix B: Senior Hamas figures who have filled teaching and administrative positions in the IUG

- ◆ Overview

- ◆ Academia, anti-Semitism and support for terrorism: the case of Dr. Saleh Hussein Regeb
- ◆ Examples of senior Hamas figures who have held teaching and administrative positions in the IUG

► Appendix C: EU support for the IUG

- ◆ Erasmus+: Overview
- ◆ Including the IUG in Erasmus+ projects
- ◆ The Horizon 2020 project
- ◆ The Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) project
- ◆ The Sustainable Urban Demonstration Project (SUDEP)
- ◆ Other EU-funded projects