



11 July 2024

International Science Council position on the role of universities in enabling responsible discussion and upholding rational debate in times of crisis

1. The International Science Council (ISC), as the global voice for science, recognizes and seeks to uphold the freedom of expression and association that underpins scientific and social advancement at universities where robust, responsible discussion and rational debate are core values.
2. The ISC respects the primacy of the individual conscience of academics who decide to limit or refuse scholarly communication or collaboration with other academics, academic communities or academic institutions. In addition, the ISC respects the right of peaceful protestors to engage the wider community in conversations about issues of social justice.
3. Freedom of speech is a human right and a paramount value of universities. Campus protest by academic community members during conflicts is an exercise of that human right and a legitimate element of university life. However, freedom of speech does not extend to conduct that extensively disrupts the teaching and research missions of the university, nor does it extend to conduct that denies others the right to disagree, to stay neutral or not to engage. The ISC believes that university management should strive to enable responsible discussion and rational debate within campus communities without inhibiting peaceful activism or interfering with the exercise of freedom of speech by community members. The ISC enjoins university management to consider carefully whether protests on campus exceed the reasonable limits of the right to freedom of speech and to avoid undue influence from third parties who may disagree with campus community protest activities and decision-making.
4. The ISC notes that universities can uphold the right to freedom of speech on campus while never being required to accept expressions of racist abuse and hate, including expressions of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Such speech should not be tolerated. Racist discourse by groups or individuals joining a larger protest movement for their own purposes should not be used to characterize the whole of any community protest movement.
5. The ISC reaffirms its [Principles of Freedom and Responsibility in Science](#) reflecting [Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (read in conjunction with [Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)). The ISC does not endorse [academic boycotts](#) aimed at denying communities of scholars the resources and opportunities they need to pursue their academic activities. At the same time, the ISC stands for freedom of speech and recognizes the deliberative value of peaceful protests.

The International Science Council (ISC) is a non-governmental organization with a unique global membership that brings together more than 250 international scientific Unions and Associations, national and regional scientific organizations including Academies and Research Councils, international Federations and Societies, and Young Academies and Associations.

The vision of the ISC is science as a global public good.