

Welcome to Baqa'a Refugee Camp

Baqa'a camp was one of six "emergency" camps set up in 1968 to accommodate Palestine refugees and displaced persons who left the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

9/29/07

Boycott Israeli universities 'illegal'

Richard Garner, [The Independent](#)

Controversial plans for a boycott of Israeli universities by UK lecturers were dealt a potentially crippling blow yesterday.

The University and College Union, whose members backed boycott calls earlier this year in protest at the treatment of Palestinians, was told by its lawyers that such a move would be illegal.

The decision, taken at the union's annual conference in May, attracted outrage from the Jewish community and many academics.

However, the union revealed yesterday it had now been told the boycott could be in breach of anti-discrimination laws and would be contrary to the aims and objects of the union.

As a result, it cannot spend any of its funds promoting a boycott.

The legal advice states: "It would be beyond the union's powers and unlawful for the union, directly or indirectly, to call for or to implement a boycott by the union and its members of any kind of Israeli universities and other academic institutions: and that the use of union funds directly or indirectly to further such a boycott would also be unlawful."

The advice adds that union meetings should therefore "not be used to ascertain the level of support for such a boycott".

Sally Hunt, the union's general secretary who had opposed



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the boycott, said the union's first priority had always been "to keep the union safe at what has been a very difficult time".

She added: "I hope this decision will allow all to move forward and focus on what is our primary objective – the representation of our members."

The impact of the legal advice is likely to stall moves to boycott Israeli universities but provoke a fierce debate at the union's annual conference next year,

It will not stop individual members from refusing to work with Israeli universities – although such action is likely to be limited.

Jewish leaders had claimed the boycott was a "frightening" assault on academic freedom. It was opposed by the Government, and Higher Education Minister Bill Rammell even flew to the Middle East in an attempt to soothe ill-feeling created by the decision.

Reaction in Israel was so antagonistic that members of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, were talking of a boycott of British goods by Israelis in retaliation.

Last night the union's legal ruling was welcomed by ministers and university vice-chancellors alike.

Professor Rick Trainor, president of Universities UK, the body which represents vice-chancellors, said; "This is good news. We've said all along that vice-chancellors would not support such a call.

"Our view was, and remains, that any such boycott would be inimical to academic freedom – including the freedom of academics to collaborate with other academics, regardless of nationality and location."

Labels: [Israeli parliament](#), [Palestinians](#), [the Jewish community](#), [The University and College Union](#), [UK lecturers](#), [Universities UK](#)

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