



Prof. Barak Medina – Rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

To your question:

a) First of all I would like to ask you what your opinion regarding the importance of university cooperation for peace in the international academic programmes.

The role of university cooperation in geopolitical areas of conflict and social tension is envisioned by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as one of its goals and aims and an important tool in the advancement of peace and dialogue. Demographic changes, aggressive foreign policies, populism and sovranism pose challenges to all of us, and they require to set priorities and goals in the creation and implementation of democratic values and human rights policy in a world of fundamentalism. Recognizing that peace and security, development and human rights are the pillars of the system of our democracy and the foundation of collective security and well-being, and recognizing in this regard that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and that mutually reinforce each other, we firmly believe in the role of education and culture in promoting dialogue and peace.

b) Furthermore, how university cooperation can be an effective tool to support the foreign policy of the United Nations, the European Union in promoting dialogue and the culture of solidarity in crisis areas

Universities should assume a leading, and more active and visible role in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, through academic activities, such as the Rome Seminar, oriented to establish and build common values that could become the social foundations of communities. Through concrete actions taken on the Academic level, universities create and lead efforts and actions for building peace that goes beyond the academic level. The university can become a decisive actor on the mentioned processes. Building peace for the future, in a post-conflicted world from an Academic point of view, as we do at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where 17% of our students are Palestinians, means to build an environment of reconciliation. It requires efforts, thinking, beliefs and hope at the national and local levels. We should also find international partners ready to work together for the achievement of peace, and to think to inclusive agendas with specific strategies for giving sustainability to the process and avoid relapses into pre-existing mental schemes of exclusion. The role and the impact of the activities promoted by universities as part of their contribution to obtain peace in societies that are facing conflict situations is that of a social transformation agent. More precisely, the question about the

role that universities, as social transformation agents, through diverse activities such as peace and human rights education, for the victims and the actors of the conflict, has not been yet clearly and directly addressed by the UN and by European Union. The commitment to dialogue and peace far from being a simple action is a complex task that requires involvement of different and committed players willing to defend and look forward structures that make possible the condition for peace and reconciliation. The university's commitment to the socio-political contexts as well as to knowledge and scientific research reinforces the "that what happens outside directly affects the university". Therefore it is of extreme importance to confer to the Universities an active role in society because to such a participation corresponds certain dose of responsibility, for action and omission: "responsibility does not mean a dispassionate exam from the role played by the university in armed conflict and violence. On the contrary, it has to project the tasks and activities that university can successfully assume to the implementation of a civilized solution to the conflict and to the multiple manifestations of violence" (PAPACCHINI, 2002: 20).

The search for a way out, legally, morally and politically negotiated and socially shareable by violent and oppressive regimes, by civil wars, by long lasting political conflicts, by genocidal situations should become from an academic and pedagogical point of view the bread and butter of the University exchange and cooperation.

There is no doubt about the functionality of academic cooperation with respect to the objective of peace and reconciliation; it helps to neutralize images of demonic otherness, opening up glimmers of hope and humanity for all.

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