

October 22, 2023

Dear members of the TAU community – faculty and staff, students, and loyal friends,

We find ourselves in the third week of the war. In these days of mourning and sorrow, the likes of which we have not known in Israel, I visited many of the bereaved families from the university community. The events of the terrible massacre, intertwined with stories of bravery and sacrifice, leave no dry eye. You can find the names of the fallen on the university's [memorial page](#). Our hearts are with their families.

In a project initiated by the chair of the TAU Student Union, we created a [memorial exhibit](#) at our Smolarz Auditorium. On each chair in an auditorium of over a thousand seats, there is a picture of one of the victims: the fallen, the murdered, and the captive. It is hard to divert your eyes from the image of Kfir, a nine-month-old baby, under whose face the word "hostage" appears. We experienced a holocaust, here in our land.

Tel Aviv University continues to assist both the residents of the south and the overall war effort. Families from the south are being hosted free of charge in the student dormitories, with more on the way. The university's Sylvan Adams Sports Center has also opened its doors to evacuees from the south and north. In addition, a team has been established to work with the Vice President for Equality, Diversity, and Community, and the Dean of Students, whose joint role is to manage and promote volunteer activities on campus. The team includes Prof. Itai Ater (Coller School of Management), Prof. Liad Mudrik (School of Psychological Sciences), and Prof. Michal Feldman (Blavatnik School of Computer Science).

In addition to activities that I reported to you in an [update](#) a week ago, we are currently recruiting volunteers to assist communities in the south in general, and those surrounding Gaza in particular. Members of the university community went to volunteer in moshav Ein Habesor. A few days ago, I visited our own Prof. Yftach Gepner from the Faculty of Medicine, whose brother was injured in the terrorist attack there. In the heat of the moment, Yftach managed to rescue his brother, who is now recovering in the hospital. We hope to send additional volunteers to other communities in the south in the coming days.

The university campus is functioning, but unfortunately without its students. It is important not to leave our reserve soldiers behind either financially or academically! Students called up to serve

have been exempted from rent at the university dormitories for the month of October (it should be noted that the dormitories are not owned by the University), and all TAU students have had their tuition fee payments postponed. Through the Student Success Center, and thanks to our generous donors, we are working to provide student reservists with additional financial aid both for now and for when they return from the war. Our students from the south will also receive assistance from the Dean of Students in cases of economic need.

One last, very important issue that I want to address is incitement on campus. Our nerves are raw; the pain and anger affect us all. But precisely because of this, and because of who we are, we must act responsibly. We take very seriously any campus expressions of solidarity with Hamas terrorists. The TAU Rector recently distributed a letter clarifying that TAU will take a firm hand – within the limits of the law and university regulations – against these instigators, whose numbers are less than a handful. In the same vein, we must strongly denounce the shocking claim being made here and around the world, including on some university campuses in the US, that the Hamas massacre is a "political issue" about which differing views can be expressed under freedom of speech. There can be no greater mistake. There is no difference between this claim and the claim that the Holocaust is a controversial political issue that is open to legitimate debate.

At the same time, we are facing a worrisome phenomenon of incitement via social media, most probably by people outside the university community, against Arab students. False stories and baseless rumors are being spread about Arab students supposedly identifying with Hamas. We, the Jews, who have suffered blood libels for hundreds of years, need to be especially sensitive to this. Incitement against Arab students who have done no harm is wicked and cowardly. Not only does it harm the innocent, but it also endangers our national resilience, cohesion and security. We must condemn and distance ourselves from those inciting against the innocent. Please refrain from cooperating with them and think for a moment before forwarding posts that may not be true. This difficult period requires that we all exercise social responsibility.

Returning to campus and normal life will not be easy. The terrible personal and collective pain will not quickly subside. But like a phoenix rising from the ashes, we will rise and continue onward.

Yours sincerely,



Ariel Porat