



KPA Extraordinary General Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday 11th December 2023

Time: 17:00 – 19:00 CBA 0.061 and online via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Graham Davies, Ellie Assaf, Gabriella Mazhar, Georgia Souter, Aadam Butt, Sivakaran Navaratnam, Dom Cox, Natasha McHugh, Clara Paul, Edward Hardiman, Sheeru Shamsi, Emma Bonfiglio, Canaan Akintunde, Isabel Martin – Lyons, Eleanor Jervis, Sophia Taha, Sahar Abdalla, Muhammad Sohaib, Jacob Noble, Paul Johnstone, Rebecca Morris, Noah, Matt Jones, Julia Lawton, Olalekan Olatunji, Mofeoluwa John Olatunde, Shargava Karkalli Sandeep, Maddy Smith, Connor Thomson, Olalekan Adedokun, Chloe Lousier, Joe May Bengier, Poppy Daniels, Gurkirandeep Kaur, Khadija Khadija, Charlotte Davies, Chris Mountford, Ash Fiaz, Shihao Gong, Martin Goodhead, James Holden, Poppy Beale, Lily Cogher, Amy Blaney, Laura Carter, Gabriel Odour, Bethany Edge, Sayed Miah, Mohammed Younis, Abdelrhman Rayis, Mark Oliver, Jamal Abdi, Namon Ahmad, Rebecca Bowler (Chair), Michel Ghrayeb (Vice- President), Aayush Batra (Association Secretary).

1. Apologies

Rachana Dhaka, Harshit Mishra.

2. Motion proposal

Presented by: Bethany Edge

Seconded by: Sophia Taha

Bethany Edge (**BE**) Represented 56 students who signed the petition calling for EGM. BE read out the following motions:

- i. Proactively work with the other unions on campus particularly the SU and UCU to take action and state an explicit position of solidarity with Palestine.
- ii. To fight for our members directly impacted by this genocide including by asking for extensions to work deadlines, material financial support if in hardship, support with Visas, and more appropriate emotional support.
- iii. To call upon Keele University to release a public statement condemning the ongoing genocide and violence against Palestinians, as well as providing support to our staff and students in this traumatic time (as done with the Russian invasion of Ukraine)
- iv. Work with Keele to affirm and uphold our institution's legal and normative commitments to academic freedom, and protections of Keele students in the exercise of that freedom and to defend the right for peaceful protest.
- v. Affirm the right of postgraduate students to be able to voice solidarity with Palestinians and the Jewish community during the unfolding violence.
- vi. Defend and support postgraduate students at Keele in their right to dissent and protest.
- vii. Acknowledge the ongoing settler colonial occupation of Palestine and escalation of genocidal violence by the apartheid Israeli state, now culminating in the indiscriminate attack and siege on Gaza, as well as:

- a. The mass killings of civilians, of at least 17,000 to date according to the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, and the further internal displacement of 1.5 million citizens, according to the United Nations
 - b. The strike on academic institutions, including the bombing of the University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, the North Gaza and Tubas branches of Al-Quds Open University, and 19 other HE institutions, alongside hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.
 - c. The attacks on our sector's academic freedom and the right to protest in our sector and our workplace with particularly worrying attacks on Palestinian academics, workers students, and their supporters, by the British state, university management, and the media.
- viii. Mourn the victims who have lost their lives in this conflict since 7 October 2023.
 - ix. Support the demand for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine, including the lifting of the Israeli siege of Gaza and the urgent provision of humanitarian aid.
 - x. Support the calls for the return of all captured and detained including approximately 200 hostages held by Hamas and approximately 10,000 Palestinians currently imprisoned in Israel.
 - xi. To call for the suspension of UK political and military support to Israel, which is used to perpetrate war crimes and crimes against humanity.
 - xii. To reaffirm our affiliation with and continue to support campaigns in solidarity with Palestine in the UK.
 - xiii. Maintain an uncompromising position against all forms of racism, including Islamophobia and Antisemitism.

BE & ST requested for addition of two more motions:

- Proactively work with other unions on campus, particularly the SU and UCU to state an explicit position of solidarity for members of our community affected by the genocide in Palestine.
- Encourage the continuing education of the Keele community by making spaces available (on request) for teach-outs, craftivism sessions, or similarly related activities.

Chair: allowed the motions to be included.

3. Discussion on motion

M: can you give a context either presently or in the past where academic freedom is compromised about the Palestine genocide?

ST- We had a vigil at the Forest of Light where we shared hope for children on both sides of this conflict and Keele University sent security over to 10 students in the rain with some candles. Through the UCU, we had some internal suppression of statements, also nationally people have lost jobs. The UKRI demanded that their quality and diversity panel be completely disbanded because they made statements in support of Palestinians. I have students who have directly lost family members that I'm teaching. We also have a colleague who is a PhD student who has lost nine members of his family.

GD - point one, to proactively work with other unions, how do you plan on doing this? What is the ultimate achievement of doing this? Also, will Keele start interfering in other controversial or non-recognized states around the world?



BE- My immediate response is to call on the KPA to work with the other bodies in the university to have a united front on this issue. And to encourage or push university management to do something more proactively. we know when Russia invaded Ukraine, the university put on an extensive support package to both Russian and Ukrainian students, which has not yet been in any way replicated in this crisis.

ST - this is a statement specifically about Palestine with specific actions for us to consider the ongoing genocide in Palestine. Palestine is a recognized state by many countries and various bodies in the UN. I do not want to debate the recognition of the state when there is an ongoing genocide. we have a direct impact on Ph.D. students who have lost family. So, these actions are asking for very specific actions in a very specific conflict.

SG- are you supporting Hamas?

BE- the answer is no. This statement does not support Hamas. It has no government implications. This statement is about condemning the killing of thousands of innocent civilians in Palestine. That is our aim. We're not getting involved in politics here. We want the university to offer greater support to Palestinian students and their families, but also to Israeli students in the same regard.

MG- Hi, everyone. I am Michele. I am vice president and a trustee of the KPA. As the VP and trustees, we have some legally binding things. We have roles and actions as a charity that we need to be following legally. we have made the motion review. Any motion that is presented to the KPA community is to be reviewed by the trustees to make sure it follows our rules and to make sure we are on the legal side of things, as a charity that aims to enhance the postgraduate community of Keele University.

MG- So in the presented motion. The following items of the first sections 1 and 3 do not support the KPA and its delivery of charitable purposes. The following items of the second sections 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 also do not support the KPA and the delivery of its charitable purpose. The rest of the points are already expressed in our recent statement similarly.

ST- Your statement that you released from the KPA did not mention Palestine once. We're asking for a statement that it does directly impact our students and our staff.

MG-It didn't mention either of them; Israel or Palestine. As a committee member, I can tell you that we aim to protect the safety of each student and provide them all with what they need, whether it's freedom of speech. If we start stating things that don't go line in line with our rules as a charity, we risk the K P. A. We can't support students anymore.

Chair- one of the things that we need to remember is that we are a charitable association. We do a lot of the functions of a union, but we're not the student union. We are bound by our aims and objectives of the charity's mission. this is why some of the points we did not highlight.



Some of them aren't highlighted because they're about supporting people at Keele, about providing space. The amendments as well, I thought sounded good from that perspective as well.

MO- If the purpose of the KPA is not to have any political involvement whatsoever, surely the charity must be disbanded. That comes under secondary legislation, which is the Charities Act. Um, plus the universities, the legislation, that comes from politics. So, the universities should be shut down as well?

Chair – we can express a political view or make a political statement only if it relates to: advancing education, promoting and protecting good health, and providing facilities for recreation and leisure time occupation of those who need such facilities in the interest of social welfare with the object of improving their conditions of life of our Keele postgraduate students. For example: UCU, the local branch of UCU, wanted the KPA to stand in solidarity with the strike. Because it affected postgraduate teachers the KPA was able to express a political opinion and put forward a political statement because it was clearly in line with the charity and its aim.

BE- You did not make any recognition of any of the issues facing Palestinian or Israeli students. You did not recognize any of the conflict. And I think your silence is doing a massive disservice to the postgraduate community. It's also a political position. Silence is a political position.

MG- The first section is that we are not only supporting students, but we are also actually students. I think people forget that. As officers we are students. We are also affected. Any word is powerful. Everything, every single letter we put out aims at one thing. To protect and ensure the safety of students. Not even put one student at risk on any side. We realize how powerful words can be to incite action and reaction. We study our words carefully to make sure that it includes everyone on campus and protects everyone on campus.

MO- there must be some sort of position of what constitutes 'politically', because if you are conservatively inclined, then you would say that promoting gender-neutral toilets is a political thing.

MG- I know the KPA supports it as it falls in the realms of our objectives.

JL- the point was supporting UCU postgraduate teachers is no different from supporting postgraduate students.

Chair- the first time UCU asked for support from the KPA it wasn't given, which I think was in the way that it was phrased, that they couldn't make it fit with the charitable aims the way that it was phrased, the time before that they asked it was given because it was phrased differently, and the KPA's support was then very carefully phrased to be: we support our



postgraduate teachers who are striking and who are being affected by this -Union action from this perspective, and we support postgraduate students whose teaching is being affected.

BE- What annoys me, and the reason I'm sitting here today is the fact that the latest KPA statement on this issue failed to recognize what Israel is doing in Palestine, and the killings. It didn't say a thing.

MG- We made our support carefully to protect the interest and safety of students on campus. Any wrong wording can lead to harm to students. That is why we made our choice of words carefully to protect them all.

Unknown - I have no connection with either of those countries. But over the last two months, I have been subject to horror on a scale that I never want to witness again. The blowing up of children, children with dismembered bodies, children in extreme pain and suffering, of a scale that I've never seen in my life. So, I do think that this warrants the attention and certainly this, this other motion that's been proposed now, how we work that would be neutral aims. That's down to you but drawing comparisons with Ukraine isn't necessarily fair because that is a war between two combatant states, whereas what we're seeing now is a genocide, a daily bombing of an open-air prison camp, as well as numerous human rights violations that have been going on for decades. I just think that needs to be taken into account, and the effect that that has on the students within the university.

MG- We are attentive to this., and we are striving to provide the most support we can in our charity.

SM- my point is to understand what's so political about. Specifying the specifics of what's happening. So, let's say you mentioned specifically in the statement about the Hamas on October 7th. You also mentioned the bombardment of Gaza right after as well.

And I don't understand how you're not, how this statement supports the students when you don't recognize these events happening because that silence means that you don't recognize it at all. Because what Israel does after is that they deny the things that happened. It's, it's very common. This is, you know, this is what they do when they're doing genocide.

They deny the genocide even happened. Five years later, they still forget about this event. They forget that there were more bombings. And what they remember is October 7th. And what you're saying by not making a statement, by making a generic statement about the Middle East, is that's saying nothing, no side. You don't want to take part in history or anything like that. You'd be ***** by the history that has happened. I don't think the Palestinian students are going to be satisfied with that because again, a lot of things can be said about conflict in the Middle East. It's cumbersome to suggest that you're not going through the specifics of what happened.

MG-I do appreciate the concern. But like I said before, like if our statement falls in the realm of our objective as a charity, we can release it. It has to fall in that realm. we can't go out of our realm to address political issues because it does not align with our charity, based on the law.

Chair- I do appreciate though, as an English literature lecturer, I do appreciate the nuance in that point, because mentioning facts, this date this happened, this date this happened, would not be then a political statement and would not take us outside our charity book anymore.

and I've just reminded myself and the statement did not do that. but again, I think, would we still be here, though, if it had? I think we might still be here because I think what you're after is a political statement, which is something that we can't do.

BE- on the same thing, recognizing Israel and Palestine would not be a political statement. And I understand that as individuals, you are across this. You are, you may be affected by it, you may not be. You may take a side and you may not. But as a charity, you can't say that you're our student representatives, you're representing us without giving us a chance to talk. This is the first chance we've been able to discuss this conflict with our student representatives. So, you cannot say you're choosing your words carefully as our representatives without hearing us.

ST- We've got 56 signatures and we've got people in this meeting who are not signatories. You don't have that engagement in anything else. I've never been in an AGM with more than 20 people. So I'm sorry, but you can't say that this isn't the student voice. And if you take a vote. Whether it's binding or not, it's not for the new number of 56, which includes people taking part-time postgraduate courses. At least we know what these 30, 31 plus in the room think. And some of these people might vote against it. So, I think we can take a vote and then you can, you know, we can go forward from there.

Chair - I think we're moving beyond the bounds of the purpose of this meeting at this point. I do think that these are very important concerns that need to be heard, but I recommend that you set up a separate venue for these because it's moving beyond what we're here to do.

Chair – let's move to vote.



VOTE to approve the motions.

In favour: 29 (9 in room and 20 online)

Against: 0

Abstentions: 1

The motion failed as it did not have a quorum.

Chair – thank you very much. I will close down this meeting and declare it over. But some of these conversations need to start happening elsewhere as well. Thank you very much everyone for your attendance and for stimulating discussion.

MG- thank you for your voice.

Any other business: N/A

--Meeting ends--