



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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Statement from the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) on the Case of Dr Toufic Haddad versus the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL)

The British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) stands in strong support of Dr Toufic Haddad's right to have his case of alleged unfair dismissal heard in UK courts, and in defence of his right to academic freedom. Dr Haddad, a respected Palestinian-American scholar of Palestine, was dismissed in 2024 from his role as Director of the Council for British Research in the Levant's (CBRL) Kenyon Institute in East Jerusalem, Occupied Palestinian Territory. He has since brought legal proceedings in the UK alleging discrimination and politically motivated dismissal.

These events raise serious concerns about the state of academic freedom in the field of Middle Eastern Studies. [The allegation](#) that Dr Haddad may have been dismissed due to his political views, particularly those critical of UK or Israeli government policies, is deeply troubling. As a publicly funded institution (through its relationship with the British Academy), CBRL must uphold the principles of academic independence and freedom of expression. Any perceived political interference not only undermines these principles but also risks damaging the credibility of UK-funded research institutions more broadly.

We are also concerned by the international legal implications of CBRL's attempt to have Dr Haddad's case heard in Israeli courts. East Jerusalem is considered occupied territory under international law, and the UK government does not recognise Israeli sovereignty over it. By asserting that Israeli courts have jurisdiction over employment matters arising in East Jerusalem, CBRL is, in effect, recognising Israeli sovereignty over occupied territory. This position contradicts established international legal norms and risks legitimising the ongoing occupation in violation of international law.

BRISMES is also gravely concerned by the closure of the Kenyon Institute, since 2024. For more than a century, the Institute served as a vital research hub, connecting UK-based scholars with Palestinian academic, cultural, and civil society communities. It housed a valuable library, archives, and facilities that supported not only visiting scholars but also local researchers and students. The loss of such an institution is particularly devastating at a time when Israeli military actions have severely impacted Palestinian universities and scholars, making sustained international research collaboration and institutional support more necessary than ever. Its closure represents a clear withdrawal of support for academic life in Palestine.

This case highlights the urgent need for the academic community to defend scholars' rights to speak freely, to challenge state narratives, and to work without fear of institutional reprisal - principles that are foundational to the credibility and future of Middle Eastern Studies. It also highlights the need for CBRL to reckon with its historical role in colonial governance and knowledge production. As an institution that once served the objectives of the British Mandate in Palestine, the CBRL should be working to support decolonial scholarship and Palestinian academic infrastructure - not furthering colonial logics by recognising Israeli jurisdiction in occupied East Jerusalem and withdrawing support from vital research institutions serving Palestinian communities.

BRISMES Council, 8 August 2025

(This statement was sent as private correspondence to the CBRL Chair on 22 July but no response was received)