



# BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

Email: [office@brismes.org](mailto:office@brismes.org)

Website: [www.brismes.ac.uk](http://www.brismes.ac.uk)

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Professor Nir Kedar  
President, Sapir College

**Sent by Email: [President@sapir.ac.il](mailto:President@sapir.ac.il)**

Professor Omri Herzog  
Rector, Sapir College

**Sent by Email: [herzog\\_o@sapir.ac.il](mailto:herzog_o@sapir.ac.il)**

10 April 2024

Dear Professors Nir Kedar and Omri Herzog,

I write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) in order to express our profound concern over Sapir College's response to the vicious campaign waged by Im Tirzu and some Sapir students calling for the dismissal of Dr Regev Nathansohn from the Department of Communications. We are deeply concerned by Sapir College's failure to adhere to its duty of care towards a member of its academic staff and by the actions it has taken since the campaign was launched, actions which in effect stifle academic freedom.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. It is committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in the UK and globally.

We understand that in late March, Dr Nathansohn signed a [petition](#) circulated by Academics4Peace entitled 'Genocide is plausible; stop arms to Israel'. The petition calls on President Biden to respect the US's obligations under international law and to stop the transfer of all offensive arms and related funds to Israel. On March 27, a group of Sapir students sent a letter demanding Dr Nathansohn's dismissal, while circulating their letter to several media outlets.

In a [response](#) to the Israeli media outlet Ynet, Sapir College stated:

We vehemently condemn statements against IDF soldiers and take seriously the harm experienced by the students. It is important for us to clarify beyond any doubt: the petition and its signatories do not represent Sapir in any way.



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Many of the students and faculty members at Sapir are survivors of the murderous Sabbath, evacuated from their homes, and serve in the military reserves and security forces, and we strengthen their hand. Alongside the basic value of academic freedom and freedom of expression, which the college has been enshrining since its foundation, we made it unequivocally clear to the lecturer that he cannot use the college's name in personal and/or political contexts, and he does not represent the college in these contexts.

We understand that alongside the media coverage there were incitements against Dr Nathansohn in online student forums, that his personal phone number was circulated among Im Tirtzu members and as a result he began receiving unsolicited phone calls, and that on the college's Instagram account there were numerous instances in which Dr Nathansohn was maligned and described as a supporter of terrorism. The college's Instagram manager 'liked' one of these remarks, which read: 'Regev Nathansohn -- Dismiss! Terror Supporter'.

We understand that on March 28 the university approved an unpaid leave of absence for six months, despite the fact that Dr Nathansohn had not requested such a leave. Furthermore, university senior management refused requests from Dr Nathansohn that the university clarify that the petition did not call for the harm of IDF soldiers.

In their response from April 1, Prof. Herzog and Sapir College's CEO, Ms. Gigi, wrote that it was Dr Nathansohn's decision to sign the petition, rather than the university's response, that 'produced the hostile working environment for [him]'.

While we understand why some Israelis might disagree with the petition circulated by Academics4Peace and may even find it offensive, it is precisely during times of war that academic freedom and freedom of expression are tested and need to be assiduously and robustly protected. It appears to us that the College has become a hostile environment for Dr Nathansohn. Since this is not the only case of a breach of academic freedom—we were told, for example, that Dr Yeela Renan's teaching hours have been reduced following attacks from right wing students—that has occurred in Sapir College since October 7, we ask the College to:

- 1) Publicly reaffirm its commitment to the academic freedom and freedom of expression of all its academic staff and students;
- 2) Issue a public statement rejecting the calls for Dr Nathansohn's dismissal and supporting his academic freedom and freedom of expression;

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- 3) Ensure Dr Nathansohn's physical and mental well-being in line with the College's duty of care;
- 4) Offer Dr Nathansohn paid leave until the atmosphere among students and faculty is one in which he feels he can safely conduct his teaching.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Neve Gordon**

Vice President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom