SeSaMO
SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

BRISMES
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

To the attention of *Magnifica Rettrice* Professor Alessandra Petrucci
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Oggetto: conference *Perseguire i crimini commessi a Gaza: l'esperienza della Fondazione Hind Rajab*

Dear Professor Petrucci,

We are writing on behalf of the respective Committees on Academic Freedom of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) and the Italian Society for Middle East Studies (SeSaMO) to express our support for the realisation of the conference mentioned above and for our colleagues, who have been working towards its organisation. We also express our profound concern at the attempts to undermine the Hind Rajab Foundation's credibility and legitimacy. These attempts have been made via social media posts and one online article by an organisation named Associazione Setteottobre, whose status is neither scientific nor academic, and whose work is aimed at shielding the Israeli state and armed forces from international and legal accountability, as suggested in their manifesto, articles, opinion pieces.

SeSaMO was established in 1995 and is the leading Italian organisation devoted to the scientific study of the Middle East and North Africa. SeSaMO's Committee for Academic Freedom (CAF) defends academic freedom, understood as the inalienable right to the transmission and circulation of research and knowledge, as well as all related freedoms (education, work, movement and residence, manifestation of thought and assembly) according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 15.3) and the Italian Constitution (Art. 33). The Committee monitors actions of censorship and restriction of research independence.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the leading academic association in the UK 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.

The Hind Rajab Foundation is a widely respected non-governmental organisation whose work is well-regarded by prominent international organisations, including the UN and the EU Parliament. The Foundation worked as a consultant for the United Nations in 2025, and in 2026, its representatives have met with members of the European Parliament on the topic of international financial accountability. We are also aware of meetings that representatives of the Foundation have held with Italian authorities. In 2026, in Florence, they participated in a day-long conference attended by local authorities, elected representatives of the Regione Toscana, Amnesty International, academics from the University of Florence, and other civil society representatives. The Hind Rajab Foundation was also invited to a conference taking place in the University of Siena, on the subject of international law and mechanisms of accountability.

The legitimacy and respectability of the Foundation is evidenced by this international status and the many public occasions on which Italian authorities and universities have interacted with it. We therefore urge you to support efforts to ensure that the conference *Perseguire i crimini commessi a Gaza: l'esperienza della Fondazione Hind Rajab* ('Prosecuting crimes committed in Gaza: the experience of the Hind Rajab Foundation) – a topic of significant scholarly importance – goes ahead as planned at the University of Florence.

The status of the Hind Rajab Foundation sharply contrasts with the profile of the Associazione Setteottobre, which does not have a scientific status. It appears to have a track-record of political activities, targeting individuals, media outlets, and initiatives that question Israel's lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law and express support for Palestinians' human rights.

All this considered, we are certain that you will not deem credible the insinuations made by this association that the Hind Rajab Foundation should not be regarded as a reputable organisation operating within the law, or that the event might not be safe for Jewish students. There is nothing in the conference programme and nobody among the speakers whose presence supports this insinuation. In line with Art. 33 of the Italian Constitution; Art. 1, paragraphs 1-3 of the Charter of the University of Florence; Art. 13 of the European Charter; and the 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, universities are venues hospitable to democratic discussion, and should be defended as such by their academic administrators. We strongly urge you to

remain firmly committed to all legal obligations on upholding academic freedom and free debate and pluralism in academic settings, and to support the realisation of this conference.

November 11th, 2026

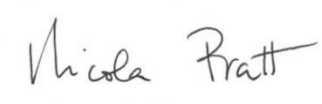




Dr Daniela Pioppi
SeSaMO President

Dr Maria Chiara Rioli
Chair, SeSaMO Committee on Academic Freedom

On behalf of the SeSaMO Board and Committee on Academic Freedom





Professor Nicola Pratt
BRISMES President

Dr Lewis Turner
Chair, BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom