



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

Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

Prof Asher Cohen
President, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Sent by Email: msasher@huji.ac.il

Prof Tamir Sheafer
Rector, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Sent by Email: rector@savion.huji.ac.il

14 March 2024

Dear Professors Asher Cohen and Tamir Sheafer,

Following BRISMES's [letter](#) to you on October 30, 2023, we are dismayed that we are again forced to write again on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) and La Società per gli Studi sul Medio Oriente (SeSaMO) in order to express our profound concern over your decision to suspend Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian from teaching at Hebrew University. Once again, you have violated Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's academic freedom and freedom of expression, and have done so in public and in a way that has the potential to put her in harm's way.

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. SeSaMO was established in 1995, and is the leading Italian organisation devoted to the scholarly study of the Middle East and North Africa.

In your March 12, 2024, letter to Knesset Member Sharren Haskel, you reiterate the charges you made in your October 29, 2023, open letter, noting that you are sorry and ashamed that the Hebrew University includes a faculty member like Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and repeat your request that she leave the university. You accuse Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian of using her right to freedom of speech and academic freedom in a "cynical way" that "divides and incites" and maintain that her utterances have put her "to shame." You then notify Knesset Member Haskel that as a result of Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's ongoing utterances you have decided to suspend her from all teaching responsibilities and conclude the letter by stating that Hebrew University is a Zionist university, thus intimating that it has no place for non-Zionist staff. Moreover, in your decision to

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales.

Company Number: 08747770 | Registered Charity Number: 1161206 | VAT Registration Number: 828 5681 90



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

Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

suspend Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian you failed to follow basic due process, violating your own university's protocols. One should note in this context that Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian heard about her own suspension from social media and news outlets before she heard it from you.

Indeed, after sending the letter to Knesset Member Haskel, you or members of your team circulated it in the Israeli public arena, sharing it with journalists and on social media, while once again utilising the atmosphere in Israel to intimidate Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian who has since received scores of threats to her life. Indeed, you not only violated Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's academic freedom and freedom of expression, but also abdicated your duty of care to a staff member of your university, putting her in harm's way. We note that in response, Professor Yuri Pines criticised your shortsightedness, claiming that he was unaware that Hebrew University had a "political position test" that staff were obliged to take in order to teach at the university.

Following your interventions, BRISMES and SeSaMO are extremely concerned about the clamp down on freedom of speech and academic freedom at Hebrew University. We would therefore request that you publicly clarify whether staff members at Hebrew University are expected to identify as Zionists and whether they can voice non-Zionist or anti-Zionist positions without being penalised by the university? Given your letter to Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian, silence on your part will be interpreted to mean that non-zionists and anti-zionists are not welcome in your institution.

Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's utterances are within the law as well as her field of expertise, hence, we call on you to immediately retract your suspension and issue a public apology to Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian that will be circulated to all Hebrew University Staff. We further ask that you inquire about her safety and assess whether she needs a security detail in the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Neve Gordon
Vice President, BRISMES
On behalf of the BRISMES
Committee on Academic Freedom

Rosita Di Peri and Maria Chiara Rioli
On behalf of the Board and the Committee
on Academic Freedom of SeSaMO