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STIFTUNG

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Dear Professor Dr Neve Gordon,

I am writing today in response to your letter of 9 May 2024. Thank you for contacting us on this matter.

On behalf of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, I would like to start by apologising if Professor Fakhreddine feels she was treated unfairly during the selection process. This was certainly not our intention.

The selection process is a multi-stage procedure. After the documents have been checked by the Humboldt Foundation's Head Office to ensure they are complete and fulfil the formal requirements, two independent scientific reviews are usually requested. In the run-up to the selection meeting, the reviewed applications are then sent to the members of the selection committee (renowned academics from various disciplines) in preparation for presenting the nomination at the meeting.

The review process takes several months. The independent committee responsible for granting the award (selection committee) comprises some 23 academics from all disciplines and meets twice a year.

As you correctly point out, the Bessel Award is bestowed on the basis of academic excellence. However, each individual sponsored by the Humboldt Foundation becomes part of the "Humboldt Network" and is encouraged to help us in our statutory goal to promote intercultural exchange. We therefore ask each nominator to state that the person they wish to nominate adheres to our [rules of good scientific practice](#). Amongst other aspects, these rules state that grounds for misconduct apply "if grave circumstances are discovered that challenge the personal aptitude of the individual sponsored to be a member (multiplier) of the global Alexander von Humboldt Foundation network" (section 2.3).

Clearly, a paragraph of this kind is necessary when building up a lifelong network, although its use has to be carefully balanced given that it is open to researchers of all disciplines and cultures worldwide. The Foundation believes that intercultural exchange can occur through

consensus as well as dissent; both, however, presuppose a willingness to engage in dialogue and an openness to discourse, especially in support of sustained academic freedom and freedom of expression. At the same time, it is essential to have established procedures in cases where the rules are invoked.

During the evaluation process, the Humboldt Foundation was asked whether some of the nominee's social media posts might be incompatible with the values of our network. To ensure that the nominee is treated fairly and to avoid a rejection based on unproven assumptions, our rules of good scientific practice request statements to be submitted on the issue. This led to the decision being postponed to the following selection meeting.

As a foundation we do believe in checks and balances. Rejections based on formal requirements, especially regarding the paragraph mentioned above, are possible, but were not deemed appropriate here. The nominee did, however, share or repost opinions on social media that potentially pointed to an incompatibility with our network as described above.

In cases like this, our next step is to contact the nominator and ask for a statement on our findings before deciding whether our rules have been violated and determining the appropriate sanctions, if necessary. As the nominator did not want to speak on behalf of the nominee, she decided, with our consent, to contact the nominee and give her the opportunity to explain her position.

There were no sanctions issued by the Humboldt Foundation regarding the nomination. Since the selection committee was already aware of the allegations, they were presented with the mentioned findings and the statement of the nominee. The committee has taken its decision based on the submitted nomination-documents and the peer reviews.

I hope I have been able to assure you that our procedures do provide for individual assessments when we are asked whether there seems to be a case of incompatibility with our network during the evaluation process; moreover, that these procedures do not infringe on academic freedom or freedom of expression but allow for an informed decision in individual cases. Our aim was to furnish the committee with a nuanced basis for their decision and to give both the nominator and the nominee the opportunity to explain their positions. We deeply regret that the nominee experienced this attempt as a form of discrimination against her.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Dr Robert Schlögl