



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

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Dear Professor,

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 the suspension and investigation of scores of Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are students and staff in Institutions of Higher Education. We write even as we grieve the heinous killings of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and call for an immediate ceasefire.

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.

As BRISMES has called for an immediate ceasefire, we are troubled by what appears to be a widespread clampdown on academic freedom and freedom of speech in Israel, particularly targeting Palestinian students and staff. We understand that on October 17, the Minister of Education, Yoav Kish, [instructed](#) universities to expel or take harsh disciplinary procedures against students who ‘express support for terrorism or identification with Hamas and Islamic Jihad’, while threatening sanctions against universities that refuse to do so. We also understand that nine university leaders have responded to Minister Kish stating that they have lost confidence in his leadership, both because their universities have always investigated such cases and because the Minister, in their view, published the instructions only to ‘gain popularity’ among the Israeli public.

We commend the university leaders who responded forcefully to the Minister’s instructions, but it now seems that some of those same universities, along with many others, are suppressing academic freedom and freedom of speech on their campuses. So far BRISMES has received information over [89 instances](#) where students and staff are either being investigated or have been suspended or expelled from Israeli institutions of higher education, among them thirteen students from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and seven students from the University of Haifa. From our understanding, the vast majority of these students expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people in Gaza and/or quoted verses from the Quran and religious prayers, actions well within the realm of freedom of expression.

Moreover, a [petition](#) signed by over 10,000 people has called for the dismissal of twenty-five staff members at Haifa University who wrote a letter criticising the suspension of Palestinian students



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from their university. The Chairperson of the National Union of Israeli Students also [issued a letter](#) supporting the removal of Palestinian students from the universities and colleges. Concurrently, we have been monitoring threatening messages to Palestinian citizens of Israel, including branding Palestinian students and staff as ‘enemies’, on Hebrew social media and telegram groups.

It is precisely during times of war that academic freedom and freedom of expression are tested and need to be assiduously and robustly protected. This will inevitably and necessarily include defending the right of individuals to express views that others may find offensive or challenging, while also abiding by the duty of care in those cases that Palestinian students are attacked by right wing students or groups. We therefore call on you to publicly restate your commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression on your campuses, and to ensure the freedom of your students and staff to express themselves, even when their views may be the views of a minority or may challenge the dominant viewpoint.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom