



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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Statement in Solidarity with the Global Sumud Flotilla Humanitarian Mission Activists and UK Scholars Dr Antonis Vardis and Hasnain Jaffer

The British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) expresses grave concern following reports about the detention of the Global Sumud Flotilla civilian activists, among whom is UK scholar Dr Antonis Vradis, Reader in Geography at the University of St Andrews, charity trustee of the University and member of its Court, and co-director of the Radical Urban Lab and Hasnain Jaffer, the vice president for health at King's College London Student Union. The vessels of the GSF humanitarian mission to Gaza were intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters on 18 May 2026. We are particularly concerned by the reports that those intercepted - all of whom have now returned home - have been subjected to abuse and dehumanisation by the Israeli forces.

As a scholarly association committed to the study of the Middle East and to the protection of academic freedom, BRISMES is deeply troubled by actions that place humanitarian actors, scholars, and civilians at risk while attempting to respond to an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. International humanitarian law and the protection of civilian life must remain fundamental principles.

Reports of inhumane treatment while in detention, lack of access to legal and consular support, and restrictions on communication with families and institutions, are extremely worrying. These concerns arise within a broader context in which numerous [human rights organisations](#), [UN Special Rapporteur](#) Ms Albanese, and major news outlets such as the [New York Times](#), have documented longstanding allegations regarding the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli detention facilities, including reports of sexual assaults, rape, and torture.

We note in particular the growing international concern expressed by legal experts and human rights bodies regarding discriminatory legal frameworks, unequal access to due process, and the wider system of occupation and discrimination affecting Palestinians, which is recently manifested in a law that mandates the death penalty for Palestinians who are considered to have committed acts of terrorism against Israeli citizens. As the [UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) declared, this law amounts to a [blatant form of racism and legalistic apartheid](#) against Palestinians, who have no guarantees of fair trials in the Israeli military court system.

We also recognise that these developments and such reports are profoundly distressing for many within the BRISMES community, particularly colleagues, students, researchers, and members with personal and professional ties to Palestine and the wider region.

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BRISMES has long defended the importance of academic freedom, open debate, critical inquiry, and the protection of scholars and students working on the Middle East under increasingly difficult conditions. Academic freedom does not exist in a vacuum. Basic freedoms and human rights must be ensured to make societies and knowledge production flourish. We therefore call on academic institutions, governments, and all relevant parties to uphold international law, protect civilian life, ensure humanitarian access, and safeguard the rights and wellbeing of scholars, students, and humanitarian actors.

BRISMES Council
29 May 2026