



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

Professor Yoseph Frost
President, David Yellin Academic College for Education
Sent by Email: yosifr@dyellin.ac.il

30 October 2023

Dear Professor Yoseph Frost,

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 of Professor Nurit Peled Elhanan from David Yellin Academic College for Education. We write even as we grieve the heinous killings of Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

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.

We are troubled by what appears to be a widespread clampdown on academic freedom and freedom of speech in Israel directed primarily against students and staff who express empathy towards Palestinians living in Gaza. We understand that Professor Peled Elhanan posted on a staff WhatsApp group a message in response to Professor Gad Yair's video clip where he calls Hamas Nazis and advocates, in his words, for a "Nakba 2" against Palestinians in Gaza, which would appear to offer a justification for the killing of thousands of civilians, including thousands of children. We further understand that in her response Professor Peled Elhanan criticises Professor Yair's use of the term Nazi and its association with Hamas, and highlights Sartre's analysis of the heinous forms of violence colonised people adopt to free themselves from colonialism.

In your letter to her, you claim that she evinced "understanding for the horrific act of Hamas" and offered "justification of their criminal act." This is despite the fact that she refers in her post to the Hamas killings as a "massacre," a term which denotes killing people "in numbers, esp. brutally and indiscriminately; to make a general slaughter or carnage of" (OED) clearly signalling her opposition to these acts, and she refers to Sartre to offer an analytic—rather than moral—explanation of the massacre. Hence, it seems to our Committee that your interpretation of her text, as it appears in your letter of 25 October, is prejudicial.



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Moreover, we understand that the invitation to the disciplinary hearing occurred without due process. According to the information we received, the faculty disciplinary committee was not convened to decide whether there was an ostensible breach of the university codes, while members of your senior staff were also not informed about the actions you were taking, and heard of your letter only after it was sent to them by Professor Peled Elhanan. Finally, it would seem that for internal procedures to be upheld, Professor Peled Elhanan should be given sufficient time to prepare her defence, and that a disciplinary hearing should not be convened one working day after the complaint was filed.

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. We therefore call on you to rescind the letter you sent to Professor Peled Elhanan, to publicly restate your commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression on your campus, to adhere to due process in any future investigations into university code breaches, 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

Cc.

Professor Nurit Peled Elhanan