



# 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](mailto:office@brismes.org)

Website: [www.brismes.ac.uk](http://www.brismes.ac.uk)

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Mr Naeem Al-Aboudi  
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (Republic of Iraq)  
**Sent By Email:** <[info@moheer.gov.iq](mailto:info@moheer.gov.iq)>

Mr Ali Al-Muayed  
Head of the Communication and Media Commission (Republic of Iraq)  
**Sent By Email:** <[enquiries@cmc.iq](mailto:enquiries@cmc.iq)>

29<sup>th</sup> August 2023

Dear Mr Al-Aboudi and Mr Al-Muayed,

I write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our profound concern about the directives issued in the last few weeks, which ban or limit the use of the terms “gender” (*al-naw‘ al-ijtima‘i* and *al-jindar*) and “homosexuality” (*al-mithliyya*) from official documents, institutions, and media platforms.

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.

BRISMES understands that the directive applies to government institutions, including universities. This is a clear infringement of the academic freedom and freedom of expression of academics and students in Iraqi universities, who must be free to explore ideas, and to use academic terminology, as they choose. It is incumbent upon governments to support and defend this academic freedom, not to infringe upon it or to narrow the space for academic inquiry.

This directive delegitimizes and devalues gender studies, which is an internationally recognised and vital field of academic study that contributes to improving the lives of women and girls and supporting their full participation in all spheres of life as well as allowing us to make sense of important societal dynamics and changes. The new directive will have a chilling effect on academic enquiry and effectively close down space for academics and students in Iraq to foster new knowledge about gender relations, gender equality, sexuality, and women’s rights in Iraq. Furthermore, in stating that the term “homosexuality” must be replaced by “sexual deviance” (*al-shudhoodh al-jinsi*), the directive contributes to and legitimizes the discrimination that people with non-normative gender and sexual identities experience in Iraq, including university students and staff.



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We urge you to rescind the directive immediately and in full, and to confirm your commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression in Iraqi universities. We offer our support to Iraqi academics and students who are challenging this draconian infringement of their academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Neve Gordon**

Vice President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom