



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

E-mail: administrator@brismes.org Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

The Right Honorable Priti Patel, MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

By Email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk

16 November 2021

Dear Priti Patel,

Re: LSE Student Protest Against Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely

We are writing on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our concern about statements you made following the LSE student protests against Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in the UK and 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 itself and in connection with the study of the region both in the UK and globally.

It has recently come to our attention that on 9 November 2021, Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely delivered a talk at LSE. According to reports from BRISMES members at LSE as well as the event's coverage in the media, the talk itself was uneventful—the ambassador addressed the students and then answered their questions as would be expected in academic settings. We understand that during the event a group of LSE students protested outside the venue and that when the ambassador exited the lecture hall and walked toward her car, these students booed her. Indeed, footage on social media shows a line of police officers cordoning off the protestors whilst the ambassador, holding a bouquet of flowers in her hands, is led swiftly by her bodyguard to the car before driving away.

The following day, you tweeted that you were “disgusted” by the treatment of the Israeli ambassador, and intimated that the protestors were antisemitic. You also called for a police investigation into the incident.

BRISMES opposes antisemitism and racism of all kinds and fully supports the government's obligations under the 2010 Equality Act to prevent discrimination, harassment and victimisation of individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity or religion. However, having reviewed the footage of the protest, we did not see any evidence to support the claim that the protestors were ‘antisemitic’.

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President
Baroness Afshar

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Prof Neve Gordon

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Prof Tim Jacoby

Administrator
Ms Amy Brickhill



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It is the legal right of any citizen to exercise their freedom of expression and voice their opposition to the policies of any government. The target of that opposition will inevitably be the official representatives of that government. While we can appreciate that passing a crowd of booing students can be unsettling, the protesters at LSE on 9 November were voicing their opposition to the policies of the Israeli government by staging a peaceful protest against Ambassador Hotovely, who is the political representative of the Israeli government, on the occasion of her visit to the university.

Unfortunately, your suggestion that the LSE students who participated in a legal protest are antisemitic as well as your support for a police investigation into this legal protest creates a chilling effect, one that undermines freedom of speech on university campuses and society more widely. Such accusations threaten the existence of diverse viewpoints within the field of Middle East studies in the UK and are, more broadly, detrimental to our democratic civic life.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Professor The Baroness Afshar OBE

President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice-President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

cc.

Baroness Minouche Shafik, Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science

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