



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

ANNUAL REPORT OF BRISMES ACTIVITIES 2025-2026

*Report of activities from June 2025 - June 2026
prepared for the 2026 Annual General Meeting of the
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)*

Over the past year, BRISMES has continued to promote Middle East studies, support scholars at all career stages, and defend academic freedom in the UK and internationally. Activities over the past year have included organising conferences and events, awarding prizes and scholarships, publicising new research and publications, disseminating funding, research and employment opportunities, publishing the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, and issuing public statements and letters in defence of academic freedom. We have also strengthened links with other associations focused on Middle East studies in Europe and the United States, primarily through our joint work in defence of academic freedom.

We have continued to stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Palestine and to advocate in cases where rights to freedom of expression and academic freedom relating to Palestine have been violated. Thanks to the generosity and fundraising efforts of BRISMES members, UCU branches and the academic community more broadly, BRISMES donated £25,000 to the ISNAD programme, which enabled 68 students in Gaza to cover their tuition fees for a full semester. Contributions have not only supported individual students but also helped sustain the wider higher education sector in Gaza and preserve opportunities for the future. This support demonstrates the tangible impact that collective action by the BRISMES community can have.

The following report provides an overview of the Society's activities since July 2025 and highlights both the continued growth of BRISMES and the collective efforts of members, staff and volunteers in support of the Society's mission of supporting scholarship, fostering intellectual exchange and defending academic freedom.

BRISMES activities over the past year fall into the following main categories:

1. **Governance and Organisational Development**
2. **Supporting Research and Early Career Scholars**
3. **Events, Outreach and Public Engagement**
4. **Publishing the British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies**
5. **Academic Freedom and Advocacy**

Governance and Organisational Development

We are pleased to announce that Dina Matar has been elected by members as the next President of BRISMES. Dina will serve one year as President-Elect before succeeding Nicola Pratt as President at the 2027 AGM. The terms of José Ciro Martinez (BRISMES Secretary) and Waseem Farooq (BRISMES Treasurer) will come to an end at this year's AGM. Both José and Waseem have made outstanding contributions to the development of the Society over the past three years, and we extend our sincere thanks to them for their service.

We welcome Wassim Naboulsi and Sabiha Allouche, who will succeed José as joint BRISMES Secretaries, and Philip Proudfoot, who will succeed Waseem as BRISMES Treasurer. We thank outgoing Council member Hanaa Almoaibed for her service on Council, in particular as Chair of the Prizes Subcommittee, and we welcome four new colleagues to Council: Amira Abdelhamid, Farah Aboubakr, Clive Gabay and Dalia Mostafa.

BRISMES currently has over 650 members, representing a significant increase compared with previous years. Our Membership Subcommittee, chaired by Wassim Naboulsi, has overseen initiatives over the past year to strengthen membership engagement and outreach to departments and event attendees to encourage new members to join the Society.

During the past year, BRISMES updated its Policy on Territorial or Land Acknowledgement for participants in the annual conference and its Mandatory Policy on Territorial or Land Acknowledgement for contributors to the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. The Society also introduced a Mandatory Policy on Ethical Publishing and Participation Standards in line with its commitment to human rights, anti-racism and decolonial scholarship.

As part of its long-term financial planning, BRISMES has been exploring the establishment of an endowment to support the Society's prizes and strengthen its financial sustainability. To this end, we are pleased to report that we have launched a fundraising campaign to support the Society's activities. Members can support this campaign by [donating to BRISMES](#), buying merchandise from our [online shop](#) and sharing these initiatives with friends and colleagues.

Together, these developments reflect the continued growth of BRISMES and our commitment to ensuring that the Society remains financially sustainable, responsive to the needs of its members, and well positioned for the future.

Supporting Research and Early Career Scholars

The Annual Conference

The BRISMES Annual Conference is the largest annual UK gathering of scholars and practitioners working on the Middle East and remains the flagship event in the Society's calendar. The 2026 conference is co-hosted with SOAS. The theme of

this year's conference, 'War, Empire and Sabotage in an Age of Genocide', reflects the interdisciplinary and international character of our scholarly community, creating space for critical dialogue, debate, and collective reflection across diverse fields and perspectives. The conference attracted **780 registered delegates** and **600 speakers** (compared to 450 registered delegates and 396 speakers in 2024) and over [100 panels and roundtables](#). We are honoured to welcome two eminent [keynote speakers](#), Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Dr Munira Khayat. Our thanks go to all those involved in organising the conference: the conference co-chairs, Sharri Plonski and José Ciro Martínez, Rosa Sansone (Conference Manager) and Alaa Shatlia (Conference Assistant), our conference co-hosts from SOAS, particularly Sophie Chamas, and our student volunteers without whom the conference would not be possible.

This year, BRISMES contributed over £9,000 to the [Solidarity Fund](#), which helps low-paid and precariously employed members and members from the Middle East and North Africa to attend the conference. 10 bursaries were awarded to applicants based outside the UK and Ireland (£400 each) and 21 to applicants based in the UK and Ireland (£200).

Annual Lecture

The BRISMES Annual Lecture provides an opportunity for members and non-members to hear from a distinguished scholar or expert within the field of Middle Eastern Studies and is also a major event in the BRISMES calendar. Last year's annual lecture was held online in November. We were delighted to welcome historian and political scientist Ilan Pappé who spoke on "[Why There is a Need for Palestine Studies?](#)". We are pleased to announce that Rafeef Ziadah will deliver the 2026 Annual Lecture in the autumn. Further details will be shared in due course.

Awards

The Early Career Development Scholarship, Conference Student Paper Prize and Leigh Douglas Memorial Prize continue to support excellence in Middle Eastern Studies and foster the next generation of scholars. We thank the Prizes Committee - Hanaa Almoaibed (Chair), Sabiha Allouche, Marianna Charountaki and Wassim Naboulsi - as well as the external reviewers for the considerable time and expertise they have dedicated to assessing applications and submissions.

BRISMES Conference Student Paper Prize

We received 10 submissions for the 2025 [Conference Student Paper Prize](#) and awarded it to Sena El Banna (University of Warwick) for her paper *Family afterlives of activism among Egyptian Islamist women since the Revolution*. Pauline Klose-Abdelghani's paper *Echoes of Erasure: 'Modern Judeo-Arabic' and Communal Belonging among Arabs of '48 in Tel Aviv-Jaffa* received an Honourable Mention.

We encourage all students presenting at the conference this year to consider making a submission to the 2026 Conference Student Paper Prize.

Leigh Douglas Memorial Prize

We received 17 submissions for this prize, awarded annually for the best PhD dissertation on a Middle Eastern topic in the social sciences or humanities completed at a British university during the previous year.

Joint Winners:

- Omar Abolnaga (University College London), *The Production of 'Ashwa'iyyat: (In)formality, Discourse, and the Politics of Space in Contemporary Cairo*
- Abdulla Moaswes (University of Exeter), *Interconnections Across Palestine and Kashmir: The Politics and Economy of Indian-Israeli Settler Colonialism*

Two Runners-Up Prizes were also awarded:

- Maram Theodory (University of Birmingham), *Constructions of Disability, Motherhood, and Activism in Palestine*
- Florence Wolstenholme (Queen Mary University of London), *Examining the role and effect of offshore secrecy jurisdictions in the United Arab Emirates*

This prize continues to be co-funded by the Leigh Douglas Memorial Fund in memory of Dr Leigh Douglas who was killed in Beirut in 1986.

BRISMES Early Career Development Scholarship

We received 23 submissions for the Early Career Development Scholarship, which supports early career scholars in developing their research and professional activities. Two scholarships were awarded to Yasmine Hafez and Danielle Andréa Krikorian.

Graduate Section Activities

In the past year, Graduate Section Co-Presidents Motasem Abuzaid and Yara Zebian have continued to expand opportunities for graduate students, doctoral researchers and Early Career Researchers (ECRs), while ensuring that their perspectives are represented within BRISMES governance through participation on Council. A list of the Graduate Section's

previous events can be found [here](#), where there are also video links to many of our previous webinars.

The Graduate Section invites members to get in touch with ideas for collaboration, events and other initiatives. Interested members can contact Yara and Motasem at graduatesection@brismes.org.

Events, Outreach and Public Engagement

Outreach and Pedagogy

The Outreach and Pedagogy Committee, chaired by Sabiha Allouche and comprising Sophie Chamas, Aya Nassar and Wassim Naboulsi, seeks to amplify the work of emerging scholars and scholars based in the Middle East, contribute to debates on contemporary issues, and promote the study of the Middle East and North Africa in the UK and beyond. During the past year, the Committee organised a range of events that brought together scholars, practitioners and wider audiences to discuss contemporary issues and emerging research. These included:

- A webinar showcasing the winners of the 2025 Leigh Douglas Memorial Prize
- A webinar on archiving with a focus on MENA collections in Exeter and Durham
- An online roundtable on war, repression and international solidarity with Iran
- Two joint events with MECACS on Sudan
- The first in a series of joint events with MERIP and SeSaMO centering Iran

Our events are free to attend and open to all. Many thanks to those who have volunteered their time to speak at our events, which are fully listed [here](#). Many of our past events can be watched on the [BRISMES YouTube channel](#). The Committee continues to welcome opportunities for collaboration with research centres, learned societies and other academic organisations. Suggestions can be sent to office@brismes.org.

BRISMES Communications

The BRISMES Communications Subcommittee, chaired by Feras Alkabani, continued its work showcasing members' scholarship and making research on the Middle East and North Africa accessible to wider audiences. Following a call for nominations, Ahou Koutchesfahani joined the committee in February. We now have over 9.1k followers on Facebook (up from 8.2k last year), 1.6k followers on Instagram (compared to 1.1k last year). We also maintain an active presence on X and Bluesky and have recently launched a BRISMES LinkedIn account to broaden our engagement across different audiences.

Over the past year, we have featured 23 publications from members in the BRISMES Newsletter, on the website and on social media. We have continued to use our social media platforms to highlight our advocacy work, promote academic freedom and free expression, and share news, events and opportunities. Our [online calendar](#) lists external MENA-related events taking place in the UK and online and the [opportunities](#) page of the website details calls for papers, vacancies and other opportunities related to Middle East Studies.

Publishing: The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

The *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (BJMES) has continued to publish cutting-edge research while expanding its reach and impact within the field. We thank outgoing Editor Lloyd Ridgeon for his outstanding contribution to the leadership and development of BJMES over the past decade. We are delighted to welcome Sophie Richter-Devroe and Ibrahim Halawi as the journal's new Co-Editors. This year the journal has continued publishing five issues per year, each containing thirteen articles. We would like to thank the editorial and advisory board of the journal for their work on the journal over the past year.

Academic Freedom and Advocacy

Committee on Academic Freedom

The Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF), chaired by BRISMES Co-Vice President Lewis Turner, works to monitor and defend academic freedom in the research, teaching and study of the Middle East in the UK and internationally, including within academic institutions across the Middle East and North Africa. As in previous years, CAF has been exceptionally active, responding to a wide range of cases concerning restrictions on academic freedom and freedom of expression. Much of this work has related to the treatment of staff and students speaking out on Palestine, as well as broader concerns arising from escalating conflict and political repression across the region.

A significant proportion of CAF's work involves issuing public statements and letters in defence of academic freedom and freedom of expression as they relate to Middle Eastern Studies. Other interventions, particularly those involving students or individual cases, are undertaken confidentially and are therefore not published on the BRISMES website. As Chair, Lewis

Turner also regularly speaks to the media on behalf of CAF on matters concerning academic freedom.

For the first time, CAF has produced a dedicated annual report providing a fuller overview of its activities and interventions during the year. We were pleased to welcome five new members at last year's AGM and thank all committee members for their extensive contributions over the past year.

BRISMES Campaigns and Future Advocacy Work

Following the winding down of BRISMES Campaigns last year, Council agreed to adopt a hybrid approach to future advocacy work. BRISMES, as a registered charity, will continue activities in support of Palestinian rights, Palestinian higher education and academic freedom in solidarity with Palestine, where these activities align with the Society's charitable objectives. The defence of higher education in Gaza and support for Palestinian scholars and students has remained a central focus of BRISMES advocacy during the past year.

At the same time, BRISMES will coordinate with a newly established informal member-led network, which has greater freedom to advocate for boycott, divestment and sanctions in line with the motion adopted at the 2019 AGM. Members interested in joining the network are invited to contact the BRISMES Manager at office@brismes.org.

The past year has demonstrated the continued strength of the BRISMES community. Through the collective efforts of members, volunteers, committee members, Council, staff, editors, reviewers and partners, the Society has continued to promote excellence in Middle Eastern Studies while defending the values of academic freedom, scholarly collaboration and international solidarity. We thank all those who have contributed to BRISMES over the past year and look forward to building on these achievements in the year ahead. At the same time, the past year has been particularly difficult for many within our community, highlighting the importance of collective support and engagement. As BRISMES continues its work, we are always keen to welcome new volunteers and contributors. If you would like to become more involved, please do get in touch.

BRISMES Officers

On behalf of BRISMES Council, 18 June 2026



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