



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom Statement on the Expulsion of SOAS Student Haya Adam

The British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) Committee on Academic Freedom expresses deep concern over the recent decision by SOAS to expel Haya Adam, a second-year Law and International Relations student and president of the SOAS Palestine Society, following a disciplinary hearing on 8 August 2025. This decision raises serious questions about freedom of expression and the treatment of student activists.

On 21 July, we wrote privately to the SOAS Vice-Chancellor to express our concern that none of the reported actions attributed to Ms Adam appeared to meet any reasonable threshold for permanent exclusion. Expulsion is an extreme sanction, generally reserved for the most serious or repeated forms of misconduct, such as physical assault, sexual violence, or sustained harassment. Applying it in this case appears disproportionate, especially as it will create potentially life-altering repercussions. Her expulsion comes after she had already been subject to an indefinite suspension, which was in place for a year.

Given that Ms Adam is an Arab woman of colour, it is particularly important to consider the broader implications of this decision, including the potential for a chilling effect on student expression. Such actions risk encouraging self-censorship—particularly among students from marginalised backgrounds—who may already feel their voices are unwelcome or scrutinised more harshly.

According to [Middle East Eye](#), the disciplinary panel found that Ms Adam breached the university's code of conduct over a video posted on 16 January to the student encampment's Instagram page. In the video, she criticised a SOAS student union co-president, stating that their tenure had “only served institutional oppression” and calling them a “careerist.” The panel ruled that these remarks amounted to “harassment,” even though the co-president in question previously declined to call Ms Adam's post harassment.

This interpretation of “harassment” represents a troubling overreach. Under UK law, harassment requires conduct that is unwanted and has the purpose or effect of violating dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment because of or connected to a protected characteristic, and/or is a course of conduct that causes alarm or distress. Furthermore, the August 2025 Office for Students [guidance](#) to prevent and address harassment and sexual misconduct, makes clear that universities should follow the definitions of harassment provided in Section 26 of the Equality Act 2010 and Section 1 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Political criticism



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of elected representatives, however robust, is a fundamental part of democratic engagement and public accountability.

While [SOAS](#) asserts that it has not expelled students for their pro-Palestine views or protests, the disciplinary action against Ms Adam followed comments in which she criticised what she perceived as a lack of action by elected student officials regarding Israel's genocide of the people of Gaza. Ms Adam has described her expulsion as "a dangerous precedent" for UK higher education, warning that it risks signalling to students that their involvement in pro-Palestine activism could lead to the most severe disciplinary sanctions.

We call on SOAS to:

1. **Reinstate Haya Adam immediately.**
2. **Review its policies and their application** to ensure they fully support, rather than restrict, students' rights to freedom of peaceful protest and political expression.

BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom stands in solidarity with all students facing punitive measures for exercising their rights to free expression within the law and peaceful protest.

*BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom
4 September 2025*

*To read previous letters and statements from BRISMES CAF, please visit:
[Committee on Academic Freedom](#)*

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SOAS Response to BRISMES Enquiry about Recent Disciplinary Action

7 September 2025

Thank you for your message of 4 September concerning SOAS' decision to expel one of our students. We note that we have had similar conversations with the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom on several previous occasions. As we have consistently maintained in our earlier communications with you, we steadfastly refute the notion that any student is or has been subject to disciplinary action at SOAS in response to their political protests in solidarity with Palestine. Such cases involve specific violations of the [SOAS Code of Conduct](#). We also stand by our [disciplinary procedure](#) which has been developed collectively and approved by our Senate, Executive Board and Board of Trustees.

Institutions are often bound to respect the confidentiality of their internal processes and procedures, particularly where they relate to decisions about identifiable students. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for us to comment or respond. This puts us into the difficult position of not being able to fully explain the decision it took to the satisfaction of our critics, even where the facts set out through, for instance, social media are incomplete or inaccurate.

However, we would like to make a few points about this matter. First, some have suggested that certain individuals, such as political activists, or those protesting on specific political issues, should be granted leeway or treated differently than others. In order for our institution to operate fairly and lawfully, however, we respond that we must apply our rules consistently and in accordance with natural justice. We have a duty of care to all members of our community, which we take very seriously. Where disciplinary action has been taken against students, it is as a result of a robust process whereby the individual's case is considered by a panel made up of staff and students who have no involvement in the case. Expulsion decisions are not made lightly, and in fact only are made when serious violations of the Code of Practice have occurred and they come after a series of lesser warnings and disciplinary actions have been taken.

None of this is to detract from the fact that we support the right to peaceful protest, and for our students to voice their concerns about and oppose the slaughter of children and civilians in Gaza. We all also believe in academic freedom as a right and recognise that the university cannot succeed when its inhabitants are silenced from speaking their mind. As a result, SOAS did not adopt a position of institutional neutrality on the war in Gaza or elsewhere as so many other western institutions did. Instead, we committed ourselves to intellectual plurality and the equal application of our rules and procedures. This informed much of our behaviour in the last two years. We were one of two institutions in the UK who called for a ceasefire as early as 2023, and we continue to speak out on the need for immediate ceasefire and unfettered humanitarian access. We have hosted dozens of events on the crisis in Palestine, including hosting UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine Francesca Albanese on several occasions. We have raised scholarship funding to bring Palestinian students to campus. We recently revised our [Ethical Investment Policy](#), creating one of the most robust and progressive frameworks of any UK university, which includes prohibitions on investments in companies that

produce and sell armaments or are complicit in the commission of war crimes. We have also begun to publish our financial investment portfolio on our website every quarter.

At a time when the solidarity is needed more than ever, we are saddened that some individuals and institutions seek to paint our university as not being supportive of the right to lawful peaceful protest and academic freedom. SOAS has a long and proud history of supporting such action and this will continue alongside our commitment to maintain a community where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity.

As noted above, this is not the first time we have responded to such allegations from BRISMES, and we question the justification for repeatedly raising these issues. Suggesting that we should treat some people more leniently than others when they violate our Code of Conduct suggests a one-sided understanding of free speech and a disregard for the rights of those whose rights have been violated. This approach would set a dangerous precedent, making our approach to free speech on campus incoherent in a time when we need it to be clear and consistent. It is untenable for any higher education institution to hold a position of preferential treatment in this regard. We are surprised and disappointed that an organisation such as BRISMES seems to hold such a position and represents the views of its members in this way.

Executive Board
SOAS University of London