



MAYOR OF LONDON
OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME

Professor Nicola Pratt

President

Dr Lewis Turner

Chair, Brismes Committee on Academic Freedom
Brismes Committee on Academic Freedom and the
Brismes Council

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (Brismes)

71-75 Shelton Street Covent Garden WC2H 9JQ

office@brismes.org

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9 April 2026

Dear Professor Pratt & Dr Turner

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Commissioner and which you have cc'd to me, about the arrest of Palestine solidarity protesters by the MPS and Greater Manchester Police for holding placards or chanting slogans that include the phrase "Globalise the intifada". Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

I appreciate the concerns that you have raised regarding the arrest of Palestine solidarity protesters. The right to peaceful protest and freedom of speech are cornerstones of our democracy and part of the fabric of this city. The Mayor of London and the Commissioner are robustly committed to safeguarding these rights for Londoners whilst equally ensuring that any protests in the capital operate within the law. I recognise that like any of our hard-won freedoms, freedom of speech should never be taken for granted.

It is fundamental that in a healthy democracy we are able to have open, robust debates. However, what is clearly not appropriate is for anyone to use language that is intended to promote hatred and division. No right or freedom can justify hatred and inciting violence, and there is no place for that in London.

It has been an incredibly difficult time for many Londoners, particularly those with family and friends in Israel and Gaza. There are clearly differing, passionate views across communities, and the vast majority of protesters in central London have conducted themselves in a lawful, peaceful, and respectful way. Disappointingly, there are some who have sought to use the conflict as a vehicle to stir up hate and division within the capital and, on occasion, have broken the law through their actions.

The role of the police in balancing free speech and the right to protest with ensuring that people act within the law. The MPS is experienced in handling demonstrations in London in a way that keeps everyone safe. The fact that most protests pass off without incident demonstrates that they do, on the whole, get that balance right.

EMAIL Kaya.Comer-Schwartz@mopac.london.gov.uk

169 UNION STREET, LONDON, SE1 0LL

It is important to note that neither I, nor the Mayor, have any power or legislative authority to direct how the police act operationally. Their independence is enshrined in law. In regard to your valuable comments regarding phrases please be assured that the police take considerable care and that they are advised by lawyers, either at the time or prior to the protest. In addition, the final judgement about whether the language constitutes an offence will be made by the Courts, with the police learning from these judgements and using them to inform future policing.

Thank you for raising these concerns with me

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Kaya Comer-Schwartz', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Kaya Comer-Schwartz
Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime