



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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BRISMES Administrative Office, Department of PAIS, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL

Professor Daniel Chamovitz
President
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By Email: president@bgu.ac.il

9 June 2021

Dear Professor Chamovitz,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our deep concerns about the events that took place on 11th May 2021 on and near your campus in Beer Sheva. These events, as we detail below, appear to demonstrate a hostile and discriminatory environment for your Palestinian and Arab students, and that on 11th May the University was unable and/or unwilling to provide them with safety and security.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES aims to encourage and promote the study of the Middle East region, and to provide a forum for educators and researchers working in Middle East Studies. As part of our remit, we are committed to supporting academic freedom in the Middle East, for scholars and students alike. It is precisely in relation to our remit that we write to express our grave concerns about your University's treatment of its students who were exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

According to footage that is available online,¹ and according to reports in Haaretz,² students from your University gathered in Beer Sheva for a protest against Israeli government policies and practices in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem. The students report that they

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&fbclid=IwAR0Q2Bud9YjguO2yOunvm-s-kWYgFb6YuXdnSLfU-yGoFIPSAbUgVTvInyw&v=GMPCO5RgaBY&feature=youtu.be&has_verified=1

² <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-facing-attacks-and-incitement-arab-students-flee-israeli-campuses-1.9823987>



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had in advance sought and received a permit from the relevant authorities for their protest. Despite the presence of police officers, the students were subject to racist and violent behaviours, and the police did not assist them. Reports indicate that numerous students were arrested and continue to be detained.

Furthermore, we are gravely concerned that the students involved have reported that they were subject to police brutality and beatings, and that they received no assistance from the University's security officers who were present. Students who had not been arrested at the demonstration went to University Dormitory D and were followed by counter-protesters who clearly sought to harm and abuse them, yet the University security did not allow the students to enter the accommodation.

Subsequently, a group of students attempted to return to their accommodation in Dormitory C. There they found the presence of those who had harassed and threatened them at the protest, as well as police officers and the University's security units. As the aforementioned online footage appears to show with some clarity, they were subject to beatings and violence from the police, and were attacked with sound bombs and tear gas while on University accommodation premises.

The reported treatment of these students, who were exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and in particular the University's failure to protect or assist them, is chilling. Such events create a hostile and discriminatory environment for Palestinian and Arab students at your University. They indicate that the University is not able and/or willing to create an environment where Palestinian and Arab students receive equal treatment, nor at which they can exercise their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. As Haaretz reported,³ many Palestinian and Arab students have fled Israeli campuses – including yours - because of the violence and discrimination they have faced in the past weeks.

We call upon you to investigate thoroughly and impartially the events that took place on 11th May 2021, to hold accountable those university employees who failed to act to protect your students, to support any students who have been detained (including those released under draconian conditions), and to ensure that you uphold the rights of all your students to freedom of expression and assembly on campus. Furthermore, we call upon you to work actively to combat racism against Palestinian and Arab students in your University and to ensure that

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those students who have left are safe to return to campus. We believe that you have a responsibility to guarantee their security, safety and rights on your campus.

Yours sincerely,

Professor The Baroness Afshar OBE

President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom