



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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

Email: office@brismes.org

Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

Prime Minister Naftali Bennet

By Email: pm_eng@pmo.gov.il

6 April 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

We write on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to protest against Israeli violations of Palestinian academic freedom. Specifically, we call on you to cancel the recently announced “Procedure for Entry and Residency of Foreigners in Judea and Samaria Region”, which will take effect from May 2022, and which will grant the Israeli military authorities absolute powers to determine the numbers and fields of expertise of international academics and students who may be present at Palestinian universities in the West Bank.

BRISMES was founded in 1973 to encourage and promote the study of the Middle East in the United Kingdom. It is the leading UK association in this field, with a global membership of academics and students and others who deal professionally with the Middle East.

Members of our Society have for a long time observed with grave concern the many ways in which Israel’s occupation has violated Palestinian academic freedom and degraded its educational infrastructure. We wrote to the Israeli government previously, in 2019, to express our opposition to Israel’s discriminatory policy against foreign nationals working at Birzeit University and other Palestinian universities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. At that time, we highlighted how Israel’s denial and restrictions of entry and residency visas for international academic faculty were causing serious damage to the teaching and research functions of Palestinian universities, imperilling the right of Palestinians to education and isolating the Palestinian community from the rest of the world.

This recent directive places further restrictions on Palestinian universities. Only international academics whose specialism is determined by the Israeli authorities to be ‘essential’ and who possess a PhD will be allowed to teach at Palestinian universities. Moreover, international applicants must convince the Defence Ministry’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) that “the lecturer will make a significant contribution to academic education, to the regional economy or to the promotion of regional cooperation and peace.” Moreover, the number of lecturers will be limited by a quota to be determined by Israel, which currently stands at 100. Meanwhile, similar restrictions will be placed on international students: currently a quota of just 150 foreign students a year will be permitted to study at Palestinian academic institutions and COGAT will limit the fields of study at Palestinian universities that are open to foreign students. The new directive will also place new restrictions on the length of stay for international academics and students.



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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

Email: office@brismes.org

Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

As the occupying power, Israel has a duty to maintain the functioning of Palestinian civil institutions, including Palestinian universities. These measures will prevent Palestinian universities from operating according to the educational and development needs of the Palestinian economy and from fully benefitting from the international exchange of knowledge and research that is fundamental to universities everywhere. They are also in violation of the right to education as outlined by the UN Economic and Social Council on 8 December 1999, in [General Comment 13](#), which stipulates that “Members of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation or writing” and that the “enjoyment of academic freedom requires the autonomy of institutions of higher education.”

Hence, we call upon you to cancel the implementation of the recent directive (“Procedure for Entry and Residency of Foreigners in Judea and Samaria Region”) and to lift all restrictions preventing international academics and students from working/studying in the West Bank.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Professor The Baroness Afshar OBE

President, BRISMES

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice-President, BRISMES



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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

Email: office@brismes.org

Website: www.brismes.ac.uk

Cc.

Minister of Justice Gideon Sa'ar
sar@justice.gov.il

Minister of Education Yifat Shasha-Biton
sar@edu.gov.il

Ambassador Neil Wigan OBE
UK Ambassador to Israel
webmaster.telaviv@fcdo.gov.uk