

Prof. Asher Cohen, President

Prof. Tamir Sheafer, Rector

Prof. Asher Ben-Arieh, Dean

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

24 March 2024

Dear President Cohen, Rector Sheafer, and Dean Ben-Arieh,

We, the undersigned Palestinian faculty (current and former) at Israeli institutions of higher education, find your recent suspension of our dear colleague, Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, highly alarming and disturbing. Your decision does not only amount to an assault on her personally, and on her internationally esteemed scholarship, but also on all members of the academic community in Israel who aim to think freely, unrestricted by state agendas and ideologies.

Universities must aim to uphold the universality of knowledge, and this requires an unwavering commitment to liberty, equality, and justice. Academic institutions must provide open and safe spaces for the free and equal exchange of ideas and evaluate them according to merit as established within the rigors of academic disciplines. Scholarly discussions can only be fruitful and meaningful within these conditions.

Regrettably, your letter of 12 March 2024 addressed to and about Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian, as well as other prior public announcements, show that Hebrew University, under your leadership, is failing to adhere to these fundamental academic principles. You would do well to recall Hannah Arendt's observation that when pervasive thoughtlessness runs rampant, immoral acts become the norm.

Your decision serves to censure Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's voice, along with the voices of other scholars and students who legitimately and rightfully question Israel's policies and actions. Such critical voices participate in important conversations with academics, legal experts, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs around the world. As a world-renowned expert on state crimes and genocide, Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian holds particular legitimacy in expressing her researched opinions. Your decision to suspend Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian sets a dangerous precedent, perilously undermining academic freedom at your institution, and potentially at other institutions as well – signaling a warning to those who might dare to speak against the state.

Instead of fulfilling your duty to protect Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's academic freedom, you are encouraging voices that support the Israeli state in its massive assault on tens of thousands of civilians. Your statements and actions work to further inflame tensions at a time when hate speech of vocal professors and students at Israeli universities, including at yours, is escalating and ultimately escaping sanction. Dissenters and Palestinians are the members of the university community whose safety, and whose right to speak freely, requires your vigilant defense today.

We, the undersigned, request that you publicly withdraw your statements regarding Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and that you work to ensure a safe space for students and faculty at the Hebrew University. Such a step would send an important message to the international academic community that universities must preserve academic freedom first and foremost.

Sincerely,

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