



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc

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21 March 2024

Asher Cohen
President, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Tamir Sheafer
Rector, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Asher Ben Arieh
Dean of Social Work, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Tomer Broude
Dean of the Faculty of Law, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

President Cohen, Rector Sheafer, Dean Ben Arieh and Dean Broude:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deep shock at your letter of 12 March 2024, in which you suspended Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian from teaching. The demand in your letter is a grievous violation of Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's academic freedom. Furthermore, the release of the letter in the current atmosphere in Israel has served as an incitement to violence against Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian. This is not the first such incident of intimidation against her at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. We wrote to you in [November 2023](#) to protest your letter of 29 October 2023, in which you admonished Professor Kevorkian for signing the petition "Childhood Researchers and Students Call for Immediate Ceasefire," and for naming the condition on the ground in Palestine a genocide.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

In your letter, you note that Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian "is enjoying the reputation of our prestigious institution" and "bringing shame" to the Hebrew University by "cynically deploying...academic freedom and freedom of expression." We would suggest that your suspension of Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian is in fact the source of cynical incitement. Since we last wrote to you, the International Court of Justice has itself ruled that Israel's action in Gaza is "plausible genocide." You

have also used the same language of your prior letter that “We are sorry and ashamed that the Hebrew University includes a faculty member like you.” We suggest, rather, that the source of shame is the Hebrew University’s abandonment of its basic duties to ensure academic freedom and freedom of expression on its campus and by its faculty, researchers and students.

It is precisely during times of war that academic freedom and freedom of expression are tested and must be vigorously defended. Your letters of 29 October 2023 and 12 March 2024 do exactly the opposite. They seek to punish Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian for speaking out, thereby not only violating her academic freedom and her right to express her professional opinion as a critical criminologist, but also creating a threatening atmosphere for the university’s other faculty, staff and students, particularly those who may share Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s views. Furthermore, as pointed out by Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, this suspension is illegal according to the Hebrew University’s own rules, as she was not summoned to a hearing or allowed to voice her perspective. In addition, the expressions that Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian is being suspended for all occurred outside the classroom and beyond the Hebrew University’s purview. We are especially concerned that the university’s position appears to be in line with a [campaign to suspend](#) Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian by Im Tirtzu, an organization that an Israeli court has [deemed fascist](#).

Your attack on Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian is an attempt to silence her, undermine her contributions, and, by extension, silence Palestinian and non-Palestinian scholars raising their voices against state violence and violations of Palestinian human rights. Suspending her from teaching, and restricting her ability to bring her expertise to the classroom violate democratic principles and go against the values of academic freedom. This public assault on Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian at a time when Israel is waging war on Gaza, and in a context in which Israeli public officials are calling Palestinians “human animals” and inciting Israeli settlers to commit acts of violence, threatens and endangers her life.

We call upon you to rescind this letter and the decision therein, condemn any and all threats against Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian and commit to upholding the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression of all your faculty, staff and students during this terrible period of war.



Re: Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian

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We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asli Ü. Bâli'.

Aslı Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, MENA
section

James Heenan, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Ramallah

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of
Human Rights Defenders

Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of
the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian
territories

Noha Bawazir, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative, UNESCO
Liaison Office, Ramallah, Palestinian delegation to UNESCO

Josep Borrell-Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy



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Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer, Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)
and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), European Parliament

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on
Human Rights

Yoav Kisch, Minister of Education, Israel