



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

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6 May 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 on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and the Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS) to express our grave concern over the 18 April 2024 arrest and detention of Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian by Israeli police officers, and her subsequent interrogations. Police also searched her home, confiscating her mobile phone, laptop, and other personal items. This escalation is a direct result of decisions by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI), including demanding in November 2023 that Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian resign from her position for signing a petition and illegally suspending her employment in March 2024 while denying her due process. MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom has written to you regarding these two incidents (see its letters dated [9 November 2023](#) and [21 March 2024](#)). While the HUJI reversed Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's suspension, the incident has compromised her security and safety, and that of her family members and students. Indeed, many extreme right-wing activists in Israel have threatened her and called for her to be prosecuted, most notably the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, who oversees the Police. Following her release from detention, she was summoned for further questioning by the Israeli police on 28 April 2024, 30 April and 2 May. Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's arrest and the investigations into her opinions and academic work are a direct outcome of the university's actions and threats.

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 close to 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and the freedom of expression, both within the region



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and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

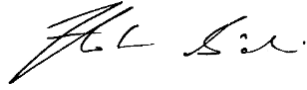
The Association for Middle East Women's Studies is the leading organization in academia dedicated to scholars and individuals with an interest in women and gender studies in the Middle East and North Africa. AMEWS is affiliated with the Middle East Studies Association of North America and, likewise, supports academic and free speech, human rights, equality and justice in the region and in the world. AMEWS publishes the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* at Duke University which furthers transnational feminist, gender, and sexuality scholarship.

Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's arrest, based on charges that are both politically motivated and unsubstantiated, sets a dangerous precedent for the persecution of critical Israeli academics, especially the Palestinians among them. The charges rely on a podcast interview with her, as well as her numerous academic works, which are internationally renowned. According to the tenets of academic freedom and freedom of speech, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian has the right to express her views and protest the actions of the Government of Israel and its military forces. Moreover, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's scholarly work should not be the basis of the criminal case against her. The appropriate venue for discussion and debate about scholarly work is the academy and not criminal courts or [the biased press](#). Particularly alarming is HUJI's involvement in this overt encroachment by the police on the academic sphere. Specifically, President Asher Cohen, Rector Tamir Shaefer, and Dean of Social Work Asher Ben Arieh are responsible for inciting the public campaign against Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a tenured professor at the HUJI. Such actions contribute to eroding the values of academic freedom and freedom of thought that should be at the heart of the mission of any university.

We therefore call upon you to desist from further engaging in or encouraging the persecution of Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian. We also call upon you to publicly apologize for your involvement in the disturbing events described above, welcome Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian back at HUJI, and support her and her students, especially those undertaking doctoral studies. Finally, we urge you to safeguard the basic rights of freedom of opinion and expression enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that make academic scholarship and debate possible.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Aslı Ü. Bâli  
MESA President  
Professor, Yale Law School



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



Sherine Hafez  
AMEWS President  
Professor, University of California Riverside



Miriam Cooke  
Chair, Human Rights Task Force, AMEWS  
Professor, Duke University

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



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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

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

Gali Baharav-Miara, Attorney General, Government of Israel

Amit Aisman, State Attorney, Government of Israel