

QMUL staff letter in support of Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian

Prof. Colin Bailey
President and Principal, Queen Mary University of London

April 24, 2024

Dear Prof. Colin Bailey,

We are writing to you to express our profound concern for the wellbeing of our colleague Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian due to her harassment by Israeli authorities and continued vilification by much of the Israeli media.

Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a Global Chair in the School of Law, as well as the Lawrence D. Biele Chair in Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is a leading authority in the fields of trauma, childhood, state crime and criminology, surveillance, gender violence, law and society.

On 29 October 2023, the rector and president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HJU) sent a letter to Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian stating that they were 'sorry' and 'ashamed' she was at their university, requested that she should leave, and were "astonished, disgusted and deeply disappointed" that she had signed and circulated a petition of "Childhood researchers and students calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza". Further, they claimed that by signing the letter, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian had committed an act that is "not very far from crimes of incitement and sedition." The letter was then disseminated around social media and provoked a barrage of hate and threats of violence directed toward Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian.

In mid-March, after Israeli television condemned a podcast in which Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian criticized Zionism while casting doubt on the scope of sexual assaults perpetrated by Hamas, the president and rector of Hebrew University issued a letter suspending her from all her teaching responsibilities. Following a backlash from both their staff and from the international community, Hebrew University's leadership later retracted their decision.

Despite her reinstatement on 28 March, Israeli government officials, media outlets, and right-wing groups persisted in their persecution and attempts to silence her because of her academic work. On 18 April 2024, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's home in Jerusalem was raided and searched by Israeli police during which they confiscated her mobile phone, computer, documents, and books. She was arrested at Hebrew University and taken for questioning. After the interrogation, she was handcuffed and taken to the detention center in the Russian compound. She said that 'there they stripped me completely, a girl searched my body, I told her that I'm not a criminal, that I'm just talking. They cursed me: 'Die', 'Burn', 'Hamas'.' She said that she was taken to the doctor at the detention center, and only after pleading and after her blood pressure reached very dangerous levels did he agree to give her medicine that was in her bag. She went on further to say that 'they took me to a room and threw a mattress on the floor. I was shivering with cold. I asked for a blanket, and they brought me a blanket that smelled of garbage and urine and was also wet.' On her arrest, Nadera said that 'I sat on the bed until morning, my

ears and nose started to bleed, I threw up, washed my face and went back to bed. I don't know how something like this happens to someone my age. The light was very strong and there was noise. The cold was terrible, my teeth were chattering, even though the blanket smelled and it was wet, in the end I covered myself with it because I couldn't stand the cold. Although I research these things, I never felt them on my flesh.' Both her hands and legs were shackled as she was led from prison to court.

The Jerusalem Magistrate's Court released her on the 19th April, stating that they found 'no substantial evidence to support the severity of the accusations or to indicate [her] involvement in further offenses'. The court ordered her release on condition that she attend any further investigations and provide financial guarantees.

Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian has since been summoned to appear for further interrogation this coming Thursday while Israel's television channels broadcasted a 12 minute segment criticising her academic writings and accusing her of spreading unsubstantiated lies.

The atmosphere within Israel is making it extremely dangerous for academic staff and students to freely express non- or anti-Zionist positions, or even to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, where according to the International Court of Justice, it is plausible that a genocide is taking place. Academic freedom has come under sustained attack and those who dare criticise Israel's war on Gaza are routinely threatened and silenced.

The president and rector of Hebrew University have paved the way for the persecution of Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and contributed to an atmosphere that has endangered her life. The undersigned members of QMUL's community therefore request that:

- 1) QMUL issue a public statement condemning the attack and arrest of its staff member and our colleague Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian.
- 2) QMUL immediately suspend its partnership with Hebrew University, given its flagrant disregard for academic freedom and its failure in its duty of care for its own staff.

Yours sincerely,

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