

Dear Malia,

I would like to thank you for your response. I need to be clear that I can only respond on my own behalf and cannot do so on behalf of the other signatories. (LATER EDIT: Other J-Soc presidents have been directly in touch to add their names)

While the clarification is obviously welcome that you do not see large Jewish societies as a problem, I think you will need to go further to reassure the 250+ signatories of the letter. You have not addressed in your response why you felt it necessary in the first place to even mention the size of our Jewish society? Do you not understand why this is something that has concerned Jewish students?

I'm sure your clarification on Raza Nadim will also be welcomed. It is still concerning to me that someone like Raza Nadim would see you as someone he would endorse in the first place. Maybe something that might reassure Jewish students would be an open letter from yourself to Mr Nadim to confirm that you do not welcome his endorsement?

I agree with you that there is an important distinction, that must be upheld, between Jewish people on the one hand, and Zionism, the belief in a Jewish homeland, on the other. I also agree with you that criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic; there is intense debate on Israel within the Jewish community as well as outside it.

There remains, however, significant cause for concern on our behalf.

Firstly, I have spoken to many Jewish students who attended the SOAS event, none of whom can recall any mention of the Henry Jackson Society. Nor is it clear, to my mind, why 'Zionist lobbies' would be relevant to a discussion of PREVENT and British domestic policy. I am struggling to think of a context in which such a comment would make sense, beyond the antisemitic idea that there is a pervasive and all-controlling Jewish lobby, cloaked under the idea of the word 'Zionist'?

You must be aware that classic antisemitic tropes manifest themselves today itself in anti-Zionist terms. Indeed, at one event that you spoke at, you shared a platform with a speaker who reinvented the classic antisemitic blood libel by claiming that Israel harvests Palestinian organs. At the same event that you claimed there is a "Zionist-led" media in your defence of violent Palestinian resistance.

Your response that you make no link between Zionist policies and Jewish people is undermined by the regurgitation of antisemitic tropes in your rhetoric. The notion of 'Zionist lobbies' and a 'Zionist-led media' is not indicative of an intelligent critique of an ideological position; it is reminiscent of the age-old antisemitic idea of Jewish power and Jewish control.

Even if I were to grant you the benefit of the doubt and accept your claim that you upheld a distinction between Jewish people and Zionist policies, it is unacceptable for a candidate for NUS President to openly use coded antisemitic language. It is all the more astonishing that it comes from someone who has a long track record in anti-racist politics.

Secondly, other aspects of your reply to our letter are worrying. The implication that my letter, which contained three entirely legitimate examples of concerning rhetoric, was a work of cynical political opportunism is insulting in the extreme. Do Jews not have a right to question an association with those who openly mock the Holocaust? Are we not allowed to question a candidate who alludes to a large JSoc being a threat? Your clarification on these matters is welcome, but the insinuation that these are invented concerns, manufactured for political gain, is not. The lack of any sort of apology is telling.

Lastly, I am confused by your comments that suggest our letter was an attack on your faith, given that I did not once mention your faith. Is the implication that concern about antisemitism is Islamophobic? The Jewish community and the Muslim community in fact have an important relationship in tackling hate together.

You will no doubt be aware that this is a time of rising antisemitism in left-wing, as well as right-wing political spaces on campus. Just recently Oxford University Labour Club members condoned the antisemitic Paris attacks, as well as calling the Holocaust a 'cash cow'. As you are running for NUS President, it will be your responsibility to purge student political spaces from these abhorrent views.

Unfortunately, your response to our concerns show that Jewish students can have no faith in your ability to tackle this phenomenon. This represents a nadir in the Jewish relationship with the student movement.

Yours Sincerely,
Daniel Clements, President of Birmingham Jewish Society

Other J-Soc presidents who have since been in touch to add their names:

Binyomin Gilbert, Goldsmiths
Sam Shindler-Glass, Warwick
Ben Assor, Aston
Raphael Waller, Brunel
Jamie Wilder, Southampton
David Slomanski, Kent
Michali Belovski, City
Jenni Heaney, Hull
Rachel Landesberg, Westminster
Abi Newman, Imperial

Avruham Sanger, SOAS
Dana Winter, Leeds
Hanna Ferencz, York
Menachem Fehler, Hertfordshire

Once again, please email danielclements1996@gmail.com if you would like to add your name. Please specify if you are a J-Soc president or signing in solidarity and that you are signing the reply and not the original letter.

Please note: I won't be adding names over Shabbat, wishing everyone Shabbat Shalom.