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[UChicago Faculty for Justice in Palestine](#)

Letter regarding Hebrew University and Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian

On April 1, 2024, Faculty for Justice in Palestine submitted the letter below to UChicago President Paul Alivisatos and Provost Katherine Baicker regarding the decision by Hebrew University to suspend Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian.

PREFATORY NOTE:

Dear President Alivisatos and Provost Baicker,

Please see below a letter signed by a hundred colleagues at the University, expressing our support for Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian of Hebrew University and our concern about our own institution's collaborations with Hebrew University. We are collectively relieved to hear that Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian has been reinstated as of March 28. Nonetheless, her initial suspension, as well as the pressure that she has experienced especially since October 7 (but also before that date), raise serious questions about the continued viability of the University of Chicago's programs in Jerusalem. It is therefore out of a commitment to the academic freedoms that we hold so dear that we ask you to consider the letter in full, and in particular the demand outlined in its final paragraph: the suspension of the Jerusalem in Middle Eastern Civilizations study abroad program at HUJI until a full assessment of political and academic freedoms on that campus has been undertaken and Hebrew University found in compliance with those institutional principles.

Asher Cohen

President, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

hupres@savion.huji.ac.il

Tamir Sheafer

Rector, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

rector@savion.huji.ac.il

Paul Alivisatos

President, University of Chicago

president@uchicago.edu

Katherine Baicker
Provost, University of Chicago
provost@uchicago.edu

Dear Professors Cohen, Sheaffer, Alivisatos, and Baicker,

We write in support of Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and against the alarming decision to suspend her from Hebrew University on the basis of remarks made during an Israeli television interview. Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian is an internationally respected scholar of genocide, gendered violence and militarization, whose work on Palestinian lives under occupation has contributed to multiple fields of scholarship. The offending statements, including the claim that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza and a call for the abolition of Zionism, are (or should be) protected by the principles of freedom of expression—both academic and political. They are squarely within her area of expertise. That Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian has been studying political violence and the on-the-ground effects of Zionism for over thirty years should lend her remarks all the more weight, deserving of not only protection but serious consideration, and should be treated as such by the institution where she has spent the bulk of her career.

It should not be the task of university administrators to respond to the demands of politicians, but to stand against them in defense of academic inquiry and political expression. If part of the justification for Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's suspension was to "ensure a safe and conducive environment" for students on campus (as has been reported), this promise should be extended to all Hebrew University students, including the approximately 14 percent of students who are Palestinian, many of whom come from East Jerusalem, where they were born under Israeli occupation. Since October 7, these students have faced increased military and settler violence, and the suspension of Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian only drives home that they are unsafe on campus as well. The message sent, not only to the professor, but to her colleagues, students, and allies abroad, is a chilling one: stay silent.

It was not the first time such a message has been sent to Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, who faced pressure to resign her position after signing a petition for ceasefire last October, and the silencing of Palestinian academics and their allies has become all too commonplace across the world since that time. It is a gentler form of the scholasticide we have witnessed in Gaza over the last five-plus months: the destruction of every university in Gaza echoed in the silencing and removal of Palestinian academics from their positions beyond its walls.

We write from an institution that proclaims freedom of inquiry and expression as first among its values. We therefore make two calls. First, we demand that Hebrew University

reverse the decision to suspend Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and affirm its commitment to the protection of these principles for all members of its community, and not only those who commit to a Zionist ideology. Second, in light of this violation of our own institutional principles, and in particular that of the Kalven Report, we demand that our administration at the University of Chicago re-evaluates our partnership with Hebrew University. This includes suspending the return of the Jerusalem in Middle Eastern Civilizations study abroad program to the Hebrew University campus until a full assessment of political and academic freedoms on that campus has been undertaken and Hebrew University found in compliance with the institutional principles that are the bedrock of the University of Chicago. Such an audit is necessary not only to ensure the appropriateness of our connection, but importantly, the safety and ability of all of our undergraduate students to participate in university-sponsored study abroad programs. Finally, we insist that this assessment should be undertaken not simply by university administrators, but by appropriate legal and area-studies scholars.

Sincerely,

Na'ama Rokem, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Comparative Literature

Michele Friedner, Professor, Comparative Human Development

Genevieve Lakier, Professor of Law and Marjorie Fried Teaching Scholar, Law

Yali Amit, Professor, Statistics

Daniel Morgan, Professor, Cinema and Media Studies

Lisa Wedeen, Mary R. Morton Distinguished Service Professor, Political Science

Bruce Lincoln, Caroline E. Haskell Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of History of Religions, Divinity School

Hussein Agrama, Associate Professor, Anthropology

Alireza Doostdar, Associate Professor, Divinity School

Kamala Russell, Assistant Professor, Anthropology

Callie Maidhof, Assistant Senior Instructional Professor and Associate Director, Global Studies

Darryl Li, Associate Professor, Anthropology

Julie Orlemanski, Associate Professor, English

Miguel Martinez, Professor of Spanish, Romance Languages and Literatures

Marissa Fenley, Harper Schmidt Fellow, TAPS

Norma Field, Robert S. Ingersoll Distinguished Service Professor Emerita, East Asian Languages & Cultures

Michael Dietler, Professor, Anthropology

Uday Jain, Postdoctoral Social Sciences Teaching Fellow, Committee on Social Thought

Jessica Darrow, Associate Instructional Professor, Crown Family School of Social Work

François G. Richard, Associate Professor, Anthropology and Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity

Isaac Hand, Collegiate Assistant Professor, Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts

Audre Smikle, Communications Assistant, Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity

E. Anne Beal, Senior Lecturer, Social Sciences Collegiate Division

Agnes Mondragon, Teaching Fellow

Clifton Ragsdale, Professor, Neurobiology

John Proios, Assistant Professor, Philosophy

Caterina Fugazzola, Assistant Senior Instructional Professor, Global Studies

Noha Forster, Senior Associate Instructional Professor, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Anindita Chatterjee, Assistant Instructional Professor, Global Studies

Tracye Matthews, Executive Director, Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture

Itamar Francez, Associate Professor, Linguistics

Tina Post, Assistant Professor, English

Molly Cunningham, Collegiate Assistant Professor, Harper Schmidt Society of Fellows

Denis Hirschfeldt, Professor and Former Visiting Professor at Hebrew University, Mathematics

Joy Wang, Collegiate Assistant Professor, Society of Fellows

Adrienne Brown, Associate Professor, English and Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity

Molly Long, Research Team Coordinator, Data Science Institute

Matthew Kruer, Assistant Professor, History and Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity

Olivia Bustion, Teaching Fellow, Divinity School and Center for the Study for Gender and Sexuality

Karlynn J. Gorski, Assistant Instructional Professor, Harris School of Public Policy

Allyson Nadia Field, Associate Professor, Cinema and Media Studies

Ghenwa Hayek, Associate Professor, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Sharvari Sastry, Collegiate Assistant Professor, Theater and Performance Studies

Sarah McDaniel, Teaching Fellow in the Humanities, English and Gender and Sexuality

Hoda El Shakry, Assistant Professor, Comparative Literature

K.J. Hickerson, Assistant Instructional Professor, Department of History and the College

Jacqueline Gaines, Student Affairs Administrator, Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity

Elham Miresghhi, Assistant Instructional Professor, College and the Divinity School

Esme Segall, Fundamentals

Hilary Strang, Associate Senior Instructional Professor, Humanities

Eman Abdelhadi, Assistant Professor, Comparative Human Development

Tamara Golan, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History

Emily Cracolici, Assistant Director, Career Readiness Initiatives

Agnes Lugo-Ortiz, Associate Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures
Salomé Skvirsky, Associate Professor, Cinema and Media Studies
Jenna Williams, Roman Family Center for Decision Research
Ron Gneezy, Regenstein Library
Gabriel Winant, Assistant Professor, History
Saadia Mirza, Anthropology
Faith Hills, Professor, History
Laura Ring, Southern Asian Studies Librarian, Regenstein
Paola Iovene, Associate Professor, East Asian Languages and Cultures
Sarah Pierce Taylor, Assistant Professor, Divinity School
Colleen M. Grogan, Professor, Crown Family School of Social Work
Christian K. Wedemeyer, Associate Professor of the History of Religions, Divinity School
Armando Maggi, Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures
Colin Lavery, Student Mentor, Master of Arts Program in the Humanities
Matthew Harris, Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow, Divinity School
Anton Ford, Associate Professor, Philosophy
Mario Santana, Associate Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures
Connor Strobel, Collegiate Assistant Professor, Society of Fellows
Tristan Schweiger, Assistant Instructional Professor, MA Program in the Humanities
Rebeca Velasquez, Humanities Teaching Fellow, English Literature
Neil Brenner, Lucy Flower Professor of Urban Sociology, Sociology and CEGU
Florian Klinger, Associate Professor
Leland Jasperse, Humanities Teaching Fellow, English
Anand Venkatkrishnan, Assistant Professor, Divinity School
Kimberly Kay Hoang, Professor, Sociology
Leah Feldman, Associate Professor, Comparative Literature
William Sites, Associate Professor, Crown Family School of Social Work
Ella Wilhelm, Teaching Fellow, Germanic Studies and the College
Gabriel Ellis, Harper-Schmidt Fellow, Humanities
Damon Jones, Associate Professor, Harris School
John P. McCormick, Professor, Political Science
Angie Heo, Associate Professor, Divinity School
Eve L. Ewing, Associate Professor, Department of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity
Irema Halilovic, Operations Manager, University of Chicago Divinity School
Margaret Ross, Harper Schmidt Fellow, Creative Writing
Mariam Nawas, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
Yousef Casewit, Associate Professor, Divinity School
Maliha Chishti, Assistant Instructional Professor, Divinity School and Harris School of

Public Policy

Stephen Haswell Todd, Associate Instructional Professor, Humanities Collegiate Division

Danielle Roper, Assistant Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures

Abhishek Bhattacharyya, Teaching Fellow, Anthropology and the College

Annie Williams, Program Manager, Humanities

Christopher Skrable, Assistant Dean of the College and Executive Director, Chicago Studies
& Experiential Learning

Ben Laurence, Instructional Professor, Human Rights

Chad Broughton, Instructional Professor, Public Policy

Richard Strier, Sulzberger Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, English

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