

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak, The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

10 November 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

As officers of the British International Studies Association (BISA) and the University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES), we note with grave dismay recent actions by your government to dismantle academic freedom and stifle scholarly exchange in the United Kingdom. As [organisations](#), BISA and UACES endorse the definition of academic freedom forwarded by the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#) (1997) which includes:

The right, without prescription by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussions, freedom in carrying out research, and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion of the institution in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship, and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.¹

In particular, we note some of the most recent actions that exhibit a worrying disregard for academic freedom:

1. The [Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology](#) has sought to curtail scholarly expression of views on the ongoing tragedies in Israel-Palestine and your government's responses to them²;

¹ BISA (2022) 'Statement on Academic Freedom' available from <https://www.bisa.ac.uk/about/policies-and-procedures/statement-academic-freedom> and UNESCO (1997) 'Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel' available from <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-status-higher-education-teaching-personnel>

² Grove Jack (2023) 'Donelan's UKRI letter over Israel comments sparks free speech row' *Times Higher Education* (30 October) available from: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/donelans-ukri-letter-over-israel-comments-sparks-free-speech-row>

2. [Reports](#) have emerged of a request from the Secretary of State to collect a secret dossier on a British academic whose views run contrary to her ideological preferences³;
3. [Proposals to broaden the definition of extremism](#) to any criticism of existing British institutions and values⁴.

Advances in scholarship will challenge conventional wisdom, standard operating procedures, and even what some consider to be common sense. Robust evidence backed research, forensic evaluation of claims, and open scholarly communication are how knowledge is produced and societies progress. The protection of structures and practices that enable academic freedom are particularly vital to the continuing development of international studies as a scholarly field as it examines sensitive issues like war, international law, human rights, migration, climate change, and collective responsibility for global inequalities that are inevitably politically contentious. Therefore, we **strongly object** to the idea that any government has a monopoly on the truth or a license to circumscribe the parameters of academic freedom to align with its ideological preferences. Such actions endanger our ability as a discipline to conduct research that advances knowledge and contributes to making a positive difference around the world.

With these attempts to restrict academic freedom, your government is threatening the continuing advancement of research and knowledge of international studies in the country and the position of the United Kingdom as a global leader in this field.

Faithfully yours,



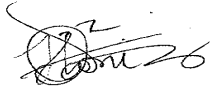
Professor Kyle Grayson
Chair of the British International Studies Association



Professor Juanita Elias
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³ Wood, Poppy (2023) 'Government prepared secret dossier on academic's BLM, 'militant leftism' and Israel war posts' *Inews* (3 November) available from: <https://inews.co.uk/news/government-prepared-secret-dossier-academics-blm-2730858>

⁴ Ungoed-Thomas, Jon and Mark Townsend (2023) 'Revealed: plan to brand anyone 'undermining' UK as extremist' *The Guardian* (4 November) available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/04/plans-to-redefine-extremism-would-include-undermining-uk-values>



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