



Rector of the University of Lausanne, Prof. Frédéric Herman

**Sent via Email:** recteur@unil.ch

13 March 2025

Dear Prof. Frédéric Herman,

We write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES), of the Société des études du Moyen-Orient et du monde musulman (SEMOMM) and of the Società per gli Studi sul Medio Oriente (SeSaMO) to express our grave concern about the treatment of Prof. Joseph Daher. We understand that Prof. Daher has been subjected to an arbitrary procedure by the University of Lausanne (UNIL) rectorate, leading to the non-renewal of his contract (signed in May 2024) as a Visiting Professor for the spring semester 2025. This sudden, unjustified and unfounded position deprives his students of his teaching at UNIL, despite the fact that his seminar course entitled “History of International Relations Post-1945” has been on the syllabus for months. Students working on their masters dissertations under his supervision have also been deprived of his supervision overnight. These arbitrary and unjustified procedures came in the context of Prof. Daher’s vocal support for students protesting in support of Palestinian rights, and the widespread repression of such advocacy in universities across the continent.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. SEMOMM, founded in 2014, promotes Middle Eastern and North African Studies in France and francophone countries. SeSaMO was established in 1995 and is the leading Italian association for the scholarly study of the Middle East and North Africa. Our organizations are committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in Europe and globally.

We understand that Prof. Daher’s contract was not renewed on the basis that he lent his university access card to a person known to him well, in order that they could access his office to rest and store their belongings. As this is [apparently](#) a common practice on campus, and because we understand that nothing untoward happened when the person in question used his access card, the punishment given to Prof. Daher appears to be not only highly selective and disproportionate, but also undertaken through an arbitrary procedure that allows him no opportunity to formally contest the motives of his non-renewal, since no formal disciplinary sentence has been issued. The non-renewal of his contract deprives him of the financial resources associated with it. We note that his colleagues in the Faculty Council of Social and Political Sciences voted unanimously by 30 votes (with four abstentions) to support Prof. Daher and protest against his treatment.

The non-renewal of Prof Daher’s contract follows months of unacceptable pressure by UNIL management regarding his alleged lack of qualifications to speak about the question of Palestine, which his academic qualifications clearly demonstrate he has, and regarding a Facebook post that some claimed was antisemitic, although this accusation that was subsequently dropped. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that UNIL Management has not provided any protection to Prof. Daher against the smear campaign to which he has been subjected for several months in the French- and German-speaking Swiss press in connection with his defense of fundamental rights and his commitment to supporting the demands of UNIL students who mobilized in support of the Palestinian cause.

Prof. Daher is an internationally recognized scholar of Middle Eastern political history. The author of several books on Middle Eastern societies, he holds two doctorates (one in political science from UNIL, the other in development sciences from the renowned SOAS University of London). He has taught at several European universities (Ghent and Paris-Dauphine) and for several years was Visiting Professor at the prestigious European University Institute in Florence. He is also involved in numerous research and consultancy missions for international organizations, NGOs and research institutes. His expertise is regularly sought by the international media.

The sidelining of Prof. Daher comes in the context of extensive repression against scholars and students advocating for Palestinian rights. We are currently facing serious violations of the fundamental principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression across numerous contexts, as highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Farida Shaheen, in her report “Principles for the implementation of the right to academic freedom” as well as by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Gina Romero, as exemplified in her [recommendations](#) to universities in the context of the ongoing mobilization in solidarity with Palestinians. We note that Prof. Daher supported students’ demands for transparency on partnerships with universities in Israel and the suspension of these agreements in the name of the precautionary principle, and that he has the right to freedom of expression on such matters. We understand the treatment of Prof. Daher in the context of these wider and deeply concerning developments.

As you will no doubt be aware, freedom of expression, including academic freedom, is protected by numerous human rights instruments and international organizations of which Switzerland is a signatory or member. The European Court of Human Rights treats academic freedom as a special concern of the Article 10 freedom of expression clause, academic freedom is protected by Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and freedom of expression is protected by Article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

We are therefore writing to express our deepest concern about this situation. The measures taken by UNIL's management appear to align with the long series of national and international attacks on the freedom to think, teach, research and learn that have affected and continue to affect teachers, researchers and students. They threaten the fundamental democratic rights of all.

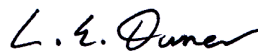
As a result, we demand the immediate reinstatement of our colleague Prof. Daher to his teaching and duties within the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at UNIL.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



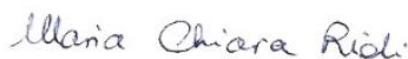
**Professor Nicola Pratt**  
BRISMES President



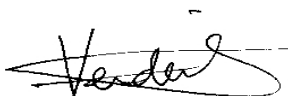
**Dr Lewis Turner**  
Chair of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom



**Professor Rosita Di Peri**  
SeSaMO President



**Dr Maria Chiara Rioli**  
Chair of SeSaMO Committee on Academic Freedom



**Professor Eric Verdeil**  
SEMOMM President