

9 November 2023

Dear Mark, Olivia, Sarah and Nicole

Thank you for your letter and the time and thought that you and others have invested in it. I was very moved by the strength of feeling it contains, as well as by the very positive sense of participation and belonging that many of you clearly feel in relation to the Society.

I have, since our initial discussions by email and phone, been reflecting on your concerns and therefore wanted to write personally and swiftly in response to your letter.

One of the things that comes across clearly is frustration at the arid bureaucratic language of 'risk assessments' at a time of such intense and appalling suffering and distress. While I was seeking to ensure the safety of visitors and contributors to *PalFest* as well as our security and front of house team, and the decision was made in good faith given the information available at the time, I acknowledge that it gave the impression of silencing a community, which was not the intention.

Looking back, I recognise that I should have engaged directly with the organisers of *PalFest* to see if we could agree on mitigations, for example switching to an online-only event or an invited audience at the Society. I want to make a personal apology for the fact that I didn't explore such mitigations.

I also want to let you know that I have committed to a review of how we make decisions in relation to venue hire events, with the intention of developing a more structured approach to how we engage a broader range of relevant stakeholders when considering risks and appropriate mitigations.

I have been in direct contact with the *PalFest* organisers over the last couple of weeks and I have reiterated our invitation to hold further events at the Society. They have responded positively to a proposal to co-organise an event in 2024 exploring the role of culture in helping to build the foundations of trust, peace and justice. All of our programming has to meet the requirements of our advocacy and campaigning policies, and our wider charitable purpose, but I'm confident we can achieve a great event within those bounds.

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I am very keen to work with our communities to ensure that this decision, made in a very specific moment, doesn't distract from the dedicated, varied and important work undertaken both by the staff of the Society and the networks of scholars and professionals it supports in addressing the challenging legacy of our discipline and the Society within it. I invite you and the signatories of the letter to engage with our channels and platforms, including the research groups, journals and conference, and encourage you to continue to make use of them to ensure diverse and marginalised voices are heard.

Additionally, I am working with colleagues to convene an open forum which will give space and time for dialogue on the issues raised in your letter and enable the Society to engage directly with geographers working on Palestine, Israel and conflict, as well as to hear directly from UK-based geographers from Palestine and Israel.

As ever, I encourage you, or any of the signatories of the letter, to contact me directly with any further questions you may have.

With best wishes



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