

Letter to the RGS concerning the de-platforming of PalFest

6 November 2023

Dear Professor Joe Smith, Nigel Clifford, Trustees, and members of the Royal Geographical Society,

We write to express our deep concern with the Royal Geographical Society's decision to cancel its hosting of a Palestine Literature Festival (PalFest) event in October 2023. The Society's response (a generic email) and [public statement](#) on the matter do not alleviate our concerns, they increase them. The RGS has made a significant error of judgement and we ask that the Society recognises this and makes amends.

The move to de-platform a cultural event on Palestine has been framed by the RGS as based on risk and a commitment to political neutrality, and we are assured that the decision was not taken "lightly or hastily". There are three clear counters here: 1. The RGS is used to high profile speakers and has the capacity to ensure security, or as much security as is needed for a literature event; 2. Cancelling an event on Palestine at a time when the UK Home Office is also attempting to suppress shows of solidarity with Palestinian people is an intensely political move; 3. There is clearly agency here, the RGS cannot argue that there was no other option, a process of deliberation indicates a different outcome was possible. From the information we have, this was a decision made by the RGS, not by the police or other local authorities.

There is a will among the signatories of this letter to re-evaluate engagement with RGS activities; we cannot work in good faith with a professional body that makes this choice at a time when Palestinian voices are being silenced, and when lives and homes in Gaza are so severely threatened. The RGS should represent the collective will of geographers – *we are the Society* – and in this case it has not. We recognise that mistakes are made and would request, as an acknowledgement of error, meaningful dialogue on remedial action between the Society and a committee of geographers that includes UK-based Palestinian geographers.

If the RGS is unwilling to revise its position on the cancellation, then we will write an open letter detailing our re-evaluated engagement with the Society and withdrawal of labour, including reviewing and editorial work for RGS journals. The undersigned includes many members, Fellows, RGS journal editors, public speakers booked for RGS events, heads of RGS research groups, and organisers of the RGS-IBG Annual Conference.

We write in solidarity with Palestinians and out of a duty of care for the RGS. **As many of us have been arguing for years, the Society must work harder to move away from its colonial and military foundations.** A re-consideration of its position on the cancellation is an essential part of this process and would be welcomed by us all.

Yours,

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