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To the Editors:

We write as the Fellows of Oxford's Middle East Centre to condemn the groundless allegations of anti-Semitism that have been printed repeatedly in Cherwell against our friend and colleague Dr Miriyam Aouragh.

Unlike the student societies who have been making allegations against her, and the Cherwell journalists who have covered the story, we know Dr Aouragh personally. She has been an active member of our teaching and research community since 2009. We can assert with confidence that the allegations of anti-Semitism are completely false and groundless.

As scholars committed to promoting an environment for the free exchange of critical thought, we condemn absolutely all expressions of hate speech, and anti-Semitism in particular. However, we believe anti-Semitism to be too serious an accusation to level without clear and certain evidence. Neither the students who have criticized Dr Aouragh nor Cherwell have provided any evidence of words or deeds to substantiate this charge.

In our view, it is the exercise of one's freedom of expression to attend protest meetings, as it is to write critically about sensitive subjects, as long as one does not cross the boundary into hate speech. It is a pernicious form of censorship to use false accusations of anti-Semitism to deny intellectuals their freedom of speech.

We urge Oxford students to drop these baseless accusations against Dr Aouragh, and Cherwell journalists to understand what it means to publish such grave allegations without verification, in order to preserve our University as a forum for the free exchange of all views – a privilege all the more precious in the current age of intolerance.

(Signed)

Walter Armbrust, Toby Matthiesen, Laurent Mignon, Philip Robins, Eugene Rogan
(Director), Tariq Ramadan, Michael Willis, Avi Shlaim (Emeritus Fellow)