



Oxford Union condemns Uygur/ Piker visa cancellation but its own hands are dirty

Description

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Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker in two separate photos. They will not be attending an up

The Oxford Union (OU) has issued a statement condemning the Starmer government for [cancelling](#) the entry visas of US anti-genocide speakers Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker.

The pair had been scheduled to speak at an OU debate and were [barred](#) by Starmer for their speech against Israel's genocide and other crimes. But its own free speech record is anything but spotless.

The government's action to please the UK Israel lobby is a disgrace, if an entirely unsurprising one.

In a post on X, [OU president, Arwa Elrayess](#) said it would proceed with the event. She added that the cancellation was a "direct threat to free expression" by the Starmer regime.

The Oxford Union intended to host Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker on 6 June for a discussion and Head-to-Head event with our members.

We are deeply concerned by the revocation of both speakers' Electronic Travel Authorisations on the basis that their appearances would not be "conducive to public good". These events had been publicly announced for months. This eleventh-hour call signals much more than democratic decline - it is a direct threat to free expression.

The Oxford Union was founded on one principle: that ideas are challenged through debate, not silenced by decree. We have never turned a speaker away because of their political beliefs nor have we sought a permission slip from the state. We will not start now.

This event will not be cancelled. The Union will ensure this discussion takes place. Free speech does not require a visa.

We will update our members shortly.

The OU is absolutely right that the UK government is a threat to free speech. It has been one at least since Starmer took over and [launched his war on UK rights](#) to protect Israel from scrutiny and resistance.

Oxford Union has dirty hands too

However, the OU's own hands are far from clean on the matter.

It boasts that it is the "last bastion of free speech". However, Palestinian-American writer [Susan Abulhawa](#) is [suing](#) the OU for deleting *five* sections from the record of Abulhawa's address to a 2024 OU debate on the motion, "This house believes Israel is an apartheid state engaged in genocide".

The European Legal Support Centre had [noted that](#) her speech contributed to the proposition's overwhelming victory "273 votes to 59". Meanwhile, the video of her speech, "garnered a quarter of a million views in one week".

However, on 12 December 2024, the Oxford Union [officially](#) deleted the original and replaced it with an altered version, cutting nearly two minutes of her speech without her consent. They concurrently issued a vaguely worded statement citing "potential legal concerns," which the claim argues are utterly unfounded.

In reality, it is claimed, this was a discriminatory, politically motivated decision to appease those offended by her truth-telling.

Two of the deletions described well-documented crimes committed by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian and Lebanese civilians:

"and in the 1980s and 1990s, Israeli soldiers had left booby-trapped toys in southern Lebanon that exploded when excited children picked them up."
"if Palestinians were systematically raping Jewish doctors, patients, and other captives with hot metal rods, jagged and electrified sticks, and fire extinguishers, sometimes raping to death, as happened with Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh and others".

Israel's use of rape as a weapon is now an established fact that the denialism of its lobby can't hide. But it can try to delete mentions of it and the OU capitulated.

First they came!

Martin Niemöller's famous poem, [First they came](#), notes how many people keep silent, or worse, collaborate with fascism when they are not its direct victims. The same goes for freedom of speech, particularly when it is attacked by Israel and its enablers.

The OU is complaining now â?? rightly so. But its complaints are undermined by its own collusion with the same Israel lobby on Israelâ??s crimes in the Abulhawa case (and [others](#)).

Itâ??s good that the OU has finally found its voice, but it comes after almost three years of genocide. There must be an end to capitulations by establishment groups and politicians while there are still Palestinian people to defend.

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