

Correspondence

Community speaks up for science in the UK culture wars

Last month I coordinated an open letter to the UK prime minister and the UK secretary of state for science, innovation and technology (go.nature.com/47exuxk), which directly challenges their vow to banish “the slow creep of wokeism” and “political correctness” from science (go.nature.com/3twjxdx).

The letter has been signed by more than 2,000 scientists and supporters (see *Science* <https://doi.org/k3hs>; 2023). Messages of thanks are also pouring in from researchers who are afraid to raise concerns because of their marginalized positions.

Efforts to improve equity, diversity and inclusion in science should not be dismissed as ‘political correctness’ – diverse scientific teams do more productive and impactful science (see, for example, B. Hofstra *et al.* *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **117**, 9284–9291 (2020); A. Specht and K. Crowston *PLoS ONE* **17**, e0278043; 2022). Also, the politicized use of reductive and oversimplified ‘biological’ models of race, sex or gender has no place in modern scientific inquiry (go.nature.com/46ts49j).

Research should benefit and be respectful of everyone. Politicians should not be dictating how scientists deal with complexity (see also go.nature.com/3qthr8). When science is misrepresented for political advantage, we must speak up.

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Israel: when reality meets academia

On 7 October, thousands of Hamas terrorists invaded southern Israel, killing at least 1,400 people and kidnapping more than 240 civilians. These include fellow faculty members, postdocs and students who are dead, wounded or still missing. Along with many other academics, we have been vocal advocates of greater liberalism in Israel (see E. Albin *et al.* *Science* **381**, 715; 2023), as well as of co-existence and peace. Yet, here we are.

We are writing this letter from our military reserve unit on the front lines, where we meet again under surreal circumstances, having left behind our families, laboratories, students and postdocs. Grant-proposal deadlines, manuscripts, teaching and experiments must take a back seat in the months ahead. Normally, such a disconnect from our labs would be catastrophic, especially for early-career scientists. Now, these problems seem trivial by comparison with the loss of life and inhumane suffering of our people in southern Israel.

We will return to our academic lives only once our families are safe again. For too long we have looked the other way, believing that liberal values would prevail. It is time to take a stand.

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Stop violation of international water laws in Gaza

As an experienced advocate of water diplomacy, I urge de-escalation of the water crisis in Gaza. In response to the Hamas attacks on southern Israel of 7 October, blockades by Israel have curtailed access to water for the Gaza Strip's two million – predominantly civilian – inhabitants.

The already stressed coastal aquifer is Gaza's principal source of water, which requires purification for drinking. Power cuts and fuel shortages prevent pumps from operating in desalination and wastewater-treatment plants. Contamination by hazardous chemicals released during bombardment is also an issue.

International conventions enshrine the human right to water that is “sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable”. Specifically, the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water Infrastructure sets out international rules that must be applied in armed conflicts. Furthermore, it provides recommendations that go beyond existing law (see go.nature.com/3nnznww).

Water supplies have also been targeted in conflicts in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria (H. Hussein *Nature* **603**, 793; 2022). Overriding the protective mechanisms of the Geneva List of Principles should never be tolerated.

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Nobel win: spotlight on the attrition of women in science

Katalin Karikó's joint win of this year's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine helps to redress the history of gender bias in Nobel awards (see *Nature* **622**, 228–229; 2023). Yet her achievement is not so much a win for female researchers as a warning of how much is being lost through the continued attrition of women in science.

Earlier in her career, Karikó's work went unrecognized and unfunded, she was demoted by the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and eventually lost her position there (see *Nature* **597**, 318–324; 2021). Her experiences are not uncommon among female researchers. Compared with men, they obtain fewer grants, article citations, speaking invitations, honours, awards and promotions, and can face biased evaluation of their research performance and leadership (see, for example, A. Llorens *et al.* *Neuron* **109**, 2047–2074; 2021).

That Karikó's world-changing science almost didn't happen underscores the urgency of implementing fundamental changes to combat gender inequity in research – before the world misses out on more potentially transformative discoveries.

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