

Lesley Watts CBE  
Chief Executive  
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

27 February 2022

Dear Ms. Watts,

I am writing on behalf of the British Palestinian Committee concerning the recent removal of children's artwork from your hospital, as reported in a press statement by [UK Lawyers for Israel](#) (dated 14 February 2023).

On 14 February, we wrote to the Trust and have since called your communications team on three occasions, in order to understand the grounds upon which the decision to remove the artwork had been made and share concerns about the hospital acting on misinformation. However, we received nothing more than a cursory and dismissive response on 23 February, stating that "some patients were offended by the artwork" and that there were "no plans to add further" to comments already made in the public domain.

It appears that the hospital has yielded to the opinion of a small number of people, together with pressure from UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI), without questioning the substance of these complaints or the reliability of the source.

UKLFI describes itself as "an organisation of lawyers who support Israel using their legal skills." They work solely to further the interests of the state of Israel, with the charitable arm of the organisation regularly [amplifying](#) viewpoints associated with Israeli right-wing extremism, including support for illegal settlements and territorial annexation. The organisation has a track record of targeting Palestinian and Palestinian-related organisations, charities, and expressions of political or cultural identity.

In recent years, UKLFI has submitted three complaints to the Charity Commission about organisations supporting Palestinian human rights, [all of which have been rejected](#). And in 2020, UKLFI were forced to [withdraw groundless allegations](#) against Defence for Children International, a charity working to promote children's rights in Palestine, after accusing the charity of having links to "terror groups".

Now UKLFI have targeted artwork by Palestinian children - and that of a particularly vulnerable group living under military blockade in Gaza - with a disingenuous invocation of the Equality Act that conflates offence with discrimination.

The implication underlying this and previous complaints by UKLFI is that Palestinian symbols of identity, for example the Palestinian flag, are inherently “offensive”, which, in itself, is deeply prejudiced, and a specific form of discrimination against Palestinians.

We understand that the artwork was the outcome of a joint project that fostered links and relationships between children at Chelsea Community Hospital School and UNRWA schools in Gaza in 2012 and has subsequently toured Europe as an exhibition. It has provided a way for Palestinian children to share stories of their lives, connect with peers outside of Gaza, and provide a source of hope, despite being subjected to oppressive and terrifying conditions.

In 2014, not two years after this project was completed, Israeli military forces intensively bombarded the Gaza strip for a second time since tightening the closure of the area in 2007. During that bombardment, 551 children were killed by Israeli forces, 3,436 injured, and more than 1500 orphaned ([UNOCHA](#)). UNICEF estimates that [373,000 children](#) were left in need of direct psychosocial support. Gaza remains under military blockade to this day and has been subjected to repeated attacks over the years, with the most recent in May 2021 leaving another 261 people dead.

To target a project of this nature - dehumanising children and smearing their artwork as offensive - is frankly appalling. While we understand that the hospital may have been put under a great deal of pressure, its capitulation and unwillingness to respond to constructive engagement with us on the issue has exacerbated the situation, lent credence to baseless claims, and ultimately failed all the children who were involved in the project. It also sets a dangerous precedent that could prevent similar projects in the future.

We therefore ask that you immediately reinstate the artwork and apologise for taking it down. We would also propose the commission of a new project with children in Gaza that reflects an understanding of their experiences today.

We are available to meet and discuss further at any time.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Aimee Shalan, Chair  
On behalf of the British Palestinian Committee



Dr. Sara Hussein, Director