



Jerusalem, October 7, 2026

Dear Colleagues and Dear Friends,

It is with profound respect, and with an even stronger sense of responsibility in the present moment, that I write, as Rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in unwavering support of Professor Massimo Maria Caneva and of the extraordinary work he has carried out over many years through the International Seminar.

We are living through dark and painful times. War, violence, fear, polarization, and the hardening of political and national boundaries have made genuine encounters increasingly difficult precisely when it is most urgently needed. In such a moment, dialogue cannot be treated as a rhetorical gesture or an abstract aspiration. It must be understood as a commitment: a difficult, demanding, and sometimes courageous practice through which universities affirm their responsibility toward society and toward the future.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem remains deeply committed to this responsibility. So does its Rector.

We believe that the University must remain a place in which intellectual freedom, critical thought, disagreement, and human encounters are possible even under the most difficult circumstances. Indeed, it is precisely when reality seems to close the possibilities of communication that academic institutions must work harder to keep them open. Dialogue does not require the suspension of criticism, nor does it ask participants to erase differences, grievances, identities, or painful historical experiences. On the contrary, meaningful dialogue requires the courage to confront them openly while preserving the dignity of the other.

This conviction lies at the heart of Professor Caneva's work.

For many years, he has created spaces in which students coming from societies separated by war, political conflict, national boundaries, and competing historical narratives have been able to meet one another not as abstractions or representatives of opposing camps, but as students, thinkers, and human beings. The importance of such encounters for our students cannot be overstated. Through these seminars, students from the Hebrew University have been able to engage with peers from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Balkans, Ukraine, and other societies marked by conflict—encounters that political circumstances would often otherwise make impossible.

This year's International Seminar was particularly significant. The intensity of the present political reality inevitably entered the seminar room. It could not have been otherwise. Yet rather than weakening the possibility of dialogue, it made the encounter more urgent, more emotional, and ultimately more meaningful. The students displayed an exceptional willingness to expose themselves intellectually and personally, to listen, to question, and to allow their own certainties to be challenged.

They did not avoid difficult questions. They confronted them. They challenged political narratives, inherited assumptions, national frameworks, and the boundaries imposed upon them by the reality from which they came. They were willing to look critically at their own societies as well as at the societies of others. At moments, discussions were intense and emotionally demanding. But what was particularly remarkable was that this critical engagement never crossed the essential boundary of respect for the other.

This distinction is fundamental. Critical thought should push against the borders of what appears politically possible. It should question established categories and challenge what reality presents to us as inevitable. But intellectual courage loses its meaning when it becomes the denial, humiliation, or delegitimization of another human being. The students understood this. They demonstrated that one can disagree profoundly without abandoning respect; that one can expose injustice without reducing people to enemies; and that one can speak from pain without denying the pain of another.

For a university, there can be few more important educational achievements.

At the Hebrew University, we understand education not simply as the transmission of knowledge but as the cultivation of precisely this capacity: the ability to think critically without relinquishing humanity, to confront disagreement without surrendering to hatred, and to imagine alternatives at moments when political reality appears to have exhausted them.

Professor Caneva's International Seminar embodies this mission.

Today, perhaps more than at any moment in recent decades, young people in our region need spaces in which they can encounter one another beyond the political and national categories that ordinarily determine their relationship. They need places where disagreement is possible without violence, where curiosity can resist prejudice, and where intellectual courage can coexist with empathy and dignity.

Most of all, they need reasons to hope.

Hope, in times such as these, cannot mean naïveté or the refusal to recognize the brutality of reality. It means refusing to accept that the reality we inherit is the only reality possible. It means creating, through education and encounter, the conditions from which change may eventually emerge.

This is why the Hebrew University considers its participation in the International Seminar not merely an academic collaboration but part of its broader commitment to dialogue, intellectual responsibility, and the possibility of a different future for our region.

Professor Caneva has dedicated his life to building and protecting these spaces of encounter. His work demonstrates that peace is not created through declarations alone. It begins through sustained human relationships, through education, through difficult conversations, and through the willingness to remain in dialogue precisely when dialogue appears most fragile.

For this reason, I strongly urge that Professor Massimo Maria Caneva receive every possible support necessary to continue and develop this important work.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem stands firmly behind this mission. We do so with the conviction that universities have a particular responsibility in moments of crisis: not to reproduce the divisions of the surrounding world, but to create the intellectual and human conditions through which those divisions may one day be overcome.

In these dark times, when so many of us are searching for signs that change remains possible, the work carried out through the International Seminar offers something both modest and profound:

evidence that young people are still willing to meet, to listen, to question themselves and one another, and to imagine a future that does not simply reproduce the violence of the present.

That possibility must be protected.

In solidarity and with the highest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Oron Shagrir', is positioned below the text 'In solidarity and with the highest regards,'.

Prof. Oron Shagrir, Rector
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem