

October 2023 Statement by Baroness Royall

The following statement was published by our Principal Jan Royall on 11th October 2023 on the Somerville College website in response to the conflict. It has since been superseded by subsequent statements.

These are dark and terrible days for the people of Israel and Palestine. The acts of terrorism and slaughter committed by Hamas are deplorable, and must be condemned in the strongest terms. They have no ideological justification nor legitimacy, and can only lead to more heartbreak and loss in a region already too familiar with those pains.

At this terrible time, I wish to share my grief, sympathy and support with all the Jewish and Israeli members of the Somerville community who are afraid for their loved ones, who have experienced the irreparable trauma of loss, or who pray for the safe return of family members.

I also wish to send the same message of unwavering love to those members of our community in the Gaza Strip, and their loved ones around the world, as they suffer the fall-out from crimes which they did not commit. These innocent people, families and children, are seeing their already broken world threatened with annihilation, and we must all speak out for the innocent on both sides of this conflict in whatever way we can.

It is hard for me to write another such message after writing similar ones about Ukraine, about Yemen, and about Syria. It is hard to see more suffering unleashed on a world in which so much suffering continues unchecked. At such times, it is easy to feel powerless, paralysed by horror. But we are not powerless.

At Somerville, we can help by not succumbing to polarised viewpoints, by truly listening to one another and by extending empathy and compassion to the victims on both sides. This, ultimately, is the point of all our learning: that at such moments we find ways to defy despair.

I have never been prouder of this College than when I see the bonds of true community that underpin all our work and relationships. I hope we can strengthen those bonds more than ever now, for the sake of our friends and loved ones everywhere.