

Excerpts from

Should a Harvard professor host a speaker with views on the Hamas attack that he finds morally wrong? Globe article by Hilary Burns and Mike Damiano 2.5.24

On Oct. 7, Dalal Iriqat said the Hamas attack on Israel, which included rape, beheadings, and massacres of civilians, was just “a normal human struggle 4 #Freedom.” She later added: “We will never forgive the Israeli right wing extreme government for making us take their children and elderly as hostages. . . . Justice shall prevail.”...

Masoud, whose Middle East Dialogues series is scheduled to include a wide range of viewpoints on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, said he wants to confront a view — that the Oct. 7 attack was justified — that he says is widely held by Palestinians and pro-Palestinian activists. In Masoud’s opinion, Iriqat’s views are “morally and factually wrong,” but he said “they are very much in the Palestinian mainstream.”...

Rabbi David Wolpe, who quit a Harvard antisemitism advisory board over former president Claudine Gay’s remarks at a congressional hearing last year, said he has heard Masoud “genuinely favors open dialogue.” But he sharply criticized Masoud’s invitation to Iriqat. “That someone who normalizes brutal massacres like Iriqat is thought a worthy subject for such dialogue shows the moral morass into which we have sunk,” said Wolpe, currently a visiting scholar at Harvard Divinity School...

Masoud recalled thinking, “In the spring, I am really going to lean into this mission and perform my role as a professor and really dig into issues with civility, rigor, and disagreeableness in the best sense of the word.”... Masoud said he did not see Iriqat’s social media posts about Oct. 7 before he invited her to participate in the dialogue series.

“If I had seen the tweets, I probably would have opted for another speaker,” he said. “I do not want to be seen as defending anything she said.” But Harvard should “foster rigorous debate” on challenging topics, Masoud said. “This is not a spa,” he said. “This is not a place where people should only feel feelings of joy and comfort. This is a gymnasium and we have to engage in difficult conversations to build up our muscles.”