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Civil Rights Group Calls on the District Attorney to Prosecute Anti-Israel Protesters at UC Davis

(April 10, 2012, New York) A civil rights group, the Global Frontier Justice Center (“GFJC”), has sent a letter to the District Attorney for Yolo County, California, Jeff Reisig, requesting the prosecution of hostile anti-Israel protesters who severely disrupted a forum of invited speakers at UC Davis on February 27th.

The GFJC letter accuses student groups of organizing the protesters for the purpose of disrupting the event and preventing pro-Israel speech on the UC Davis campus. “It’s not simply offensive to the free speech and association rights of the speakers and their sponsors,” said attorney Kenneth Leitner, the director of GFJC, “it’s a crime and it should be prosecuted.”

According to the GFJC, California law prohibits protesters from disturbing a lawful assembly or meeting. California Penal Code § 403 provides that “[e]very person who, without authority of law, willfully disturbs or breaks up any assembly or meeting that is not unlawful in its character, . . . is guilty of a misdemeanor.” The GFJC notes that the same law was recently used to gain convictions against hostile student protesters at UC Irvine for a similar protest.

Leitner added that “the protesters could have chosen to organize a counter-lecture or even to sit-in on the lecture in protest, as long as they didn’t disturb it. But by disturbing the lecture, they turned an otherwise lawful protest into an unlawful disruption. It’s a good law—it ensures the freedom of speech and association. If prosecutors don’t enforce it, the protesters are just going to up the ante.”

Meir Katz, an attorney at GFJC, noted that “the First Amendment protects the speech of protesters just like it protects the speech of the speakers and their sponsors. But the freedom of speech doesn’t give you the right to stifle someone else’s speech. Just like you can’t yell ‘fire’ in a crowded theater, you can’t yell at all during someone’s speech if the reason you’re doing it is to get that person to stop speaking.”

The GFJC’s letter to the District Attorney states that the protesters did a lot more than yell. The most vocal of the protesters, said GFJC, rose before the speakers even took the floor and declared, “My only purpose today is that this event is shut down. You have turned Palestine into a land of prostitutes, rapists, and child molesters.” And a protestor would later interrupt one of



the speakers and ask “How many women have you raped? How many children have you raped?”

The GFJC notes that the speaker tried to enter into a dialogue with the protestor, but the protestor refused, retorting that “[y]ou’re going to have to kill me to shut me up [you] rapist, child molester, [and] murderer.”

“This is about protecting the marketplace of ideas on college campuses around the country,” said Leitner. He added, “pro-Israel groups, just like pro-Palestinian groups and environmental groups and the chess club, need to be able to organize and communicate with their constituents without having to shout over someone whose only objective is to end discussion.”

Katz added that “similar groups around the country have adopted similar illegal tactics, which makes it important that prosecutors take swift and clear action.”

The letter requests a response from the District Attorney by the end of the month.

The Global Frontier Justice Center is a civil rights law organization dedicated to enforcing basic human rights through the legal system.

For a copy of the letter click here:

<http://twitdoc.com/Y2S>

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