

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Dear Friends of AMED and GUPS:

This is an urgent message to make you aware of and call upon you to support the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative (AMED) and the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) at San Francisco State University. We have been subjected to a smear campaign by Tammi Benjamin and [AMCHA Initiative](#).

In an email to SFSU President that was copied to members of the California legislature, San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and countless others (please see below), Benjamin claimed that the November 7th event commemorating the 6th anniversary of the Palestinian Cultural Mural honoring the late Professor Edward Said, [We Speak for Ourselves: Honoring our Forebearers](#), was “an anti-Semitic on-campus activity that encourages students to glorify the murder of Jews.” To support her unfounded claims, Benjamin refers to two stencils on a table in the Malcolm X Plaza during the afternoon of the event one is of Leila Khaled and the other inscribed with the statement, [MY HEROES HAVE ALWAYS KILLED COLONIZERS](#).

Aiming at invoking xenophobia and enlisting the “war on terror” in order to portray Palestinian campus activism as dangerous, illegal and outside the bounds of acceptable discourse, Benjamin refers to Leila Khaled as “a member of the [U.S. State Department-designated](#) terrorist organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)... responsible for several plane hijackings, suicide bombings that killed several Jews, and the assassination of a Jewish member of the Israeli Knesset.” Had she done a quick search as academics usually do, Benjamin would have found that Leila Khaled’s image is a popular icon frequently used by Palestinians and non-Palestinians alike to symbolize Palestinian women’s roles in anti-colonial resistance and to counter Orientalist and racist portrayals of Arab (and Muslim) women as docile, oppressed and unable to speak for themselves.

As a matter of fact, a few years ago, following the meeting of the SFSU Curriculum Review and Approval Committee (CRAC) that discussed and approved the Minor in Race and Resistance Studies (RRS), students and faculty of RRS gathered outside the meeting room to take a group photo to be posted on our website. RRS students unfurled a banner that they had made a long time ago on which Leila Khaled’s picture was stenciled. I asked the students then to put away the banner lest an impression is formed that I was behind it, being mindful of exactly the sort of smearing campaigns Benjamin has now undertaken. I recall that both RRS students and faculty laughed it away, probably thinking that I was exaggerating the effect of holding up such a banner and insisted on keeping it in the group photo. The Benjamin attack is yet another proof that we (people who support justice for/in Palestine) will continue to be targeted for our political stands.

As for the second stencil [MY HEROES HAVE ALWAYS KILLED COLONIZERS](#), contrary to Benjamin’s claim, Palestinian students were not calling for the murder of Jews or Israelis. In fact, the implication of Benjamin’s argument --that all Jews have the same political stands vis-à-vis Israel or that all Jews are colonizing Palestinian lands, lends itself to anti-Semitism. And notwithstanding her simplistic linkage of Said’s anti-colonial intellectual work, the Palestinian Mural anniversary, Palestinian students,

and AMED, the stencil was not originally created to specifically target Israel. It was more inclusive of the plight of Indigenous people and their historical resistance everywhere.

The stencil was made by Indigenous activists for an event marking the anniversary of genocide in the Americas <https://www.facebook.com/events/521584261240884/> on October 14, 2013. Posted on the Native American Indian Network <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/bay-area-native-american-indian-network/udfjGGr5Mi4/TJNmLPvAIAoJ> as the Second Annual

‘My HEROES Have Always Killed Colonizers: Stories of Global Indigenous REZistance’, the event aimed at countering the depiction of the “Indigenous warrior who has been labeled a terrorist, unpatriotic, and/or savage while defending the land, the people, and our traditional ways.”

The announcement of the event was also reproduced on the website of the Global Exchange

<<http://www.globalexchange.org/events/speaking-event-my-heroes-have-always-killed-colonizers-0>>. Silk screening was only a part of the event that included:

[A] night of song, words, and resistance, a celebration of every global indigenous warrior who's been labeled a terrorist, unpatriotic, and/or savage while defending the land, the people, and our traditional ways. Through storytelling, spoken word and performance we will collectively Re-Indigenize our heroes, such as Leila Khaled, Boukman, Lapu-Lapu, Toy Purina and Geromino so that they may claim their true role in history.

Finally, the November 7th Palestinian Mural Anniversary was not solely sponsored by GUPS and AMED, as Benjamin implies in order to isolate and target Palestinian activists. All the Murals on the walls of the Cesar Chavez Student Center <http://www.sfsustudentcenter.com/about/murals.php> belong to the student center, including the murals of Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, the Indian, Filipino and Native American struggles, and they all reflect student commitment to and activism on questions of justice relevant to struggles in their communities.

The Palestinian Cultural Mural honoring the late Professor Edward Said <http://www.sfsustudentcenter.com/about/murals.php#palestinianmural>, inaugurated on Nov. 2, 2007, the birthday of Edward Said, was the direct result of a long and difficult but successful campaign by a broad coalition of students, faculty, and staff at SFSU, working hand in hand with community members and organizations. The student coalition was led by the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), the coalition included other student groups, such as the Student Council for Intertribal Nations (SKINS) that was founded by Richard Oakes, the Indigenous student who in 1968 led the take-over of Alcatraz; Black

Student Union (BSU) that, along with the 3rd World Liberation Front (TWLF), led the successful 1968 Student Strike for a College for 3rd World Studies at SFSU; as well as other student groups that have been part of the rich history of San Francisco State University, such as the League of Filipino Students (LFS), La Raza Student Organization, and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano De Aztlan (MeCHA). The Deans of the College of Ethnic Studies, Ken Monteiro, and the College of Education, Jake Perea were instrumental in the success of the mural. Activists and organizations in the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities, Indigenous communities and communities of color, as well as anti-Zionist Jewish organizations, civil liberties, trade unions and feminist and queer groups, united around the principle of justice for Palestine as an integral and an organic part of justice for all, came together to insist that the mural see the light. The battle lasted several years during which a strong campaign was unsuccessfully waged by the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and other SF Bay Area Zionist organizations against the mural and for that matter any campus presence of Palestine.

The history of the Palestinian mural at SFSU with its broad based coalition of communal and campus alliances, on one hand, and the multiple sites that clearly show that the stencil originated with Native American activism and spoke about colonized people everywhere, on the other, debunk the most recent slander campaign of Benjamin and Company. Why would Benjamin and AMCHA then ignore all these facts and insist on smearing Palestinian activism?

As the movement for justice in/for Palestine gains grounds and grows broader beyond the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities, Benjamin and Company have escalated their campaign. Their goals are to arrive at an official position that equates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism in order to discredit us and prevent us from speaking up. When they fail to do so, as the HR 35 affair shows, they try to manipulate the truth and exact statements of condemnation from university officials by making a lot of noise and mobilizing their list-serves to create the impression that lack of statements amounts to acceptance of anti-Semitism. When all else fails, their last resort is to make enough noise to keep us occupied so we won't have the time or energy to speak up for the truth.

Benjamin and her group are not looking for constructive discussion. All they seek to do is silence speech on justice for/in Palestine. What we need to do is to be firm on academic freedom and against smearing institutions, programs and faculty who support the right of students to organize ourselves, speak our minds and pursue justice wherever injustice occurs and irrespective of the powerful groups that seek to silence us.

What you can do to support GUPS and AMED:

1. Attend an emergency meeting called for by GUPS and its allies tonight, Tuesday, November 19th, at 6pm, in the conference room of the College of Ethnic Studies, 116 Ethnic Studies and Psychology Building, SFSU <http://www.sfsu.edu/~sfsuamap/>
2. Write or call the office of SFSU President, Dr. Leslie E. Wong president@sfsu.edu to counter the campaign waged by Benjamin and [AMCHA Initiative](#).
3. Support GUPS statement by signing the petition

4. Organize events on your campus to educate and publicize the struggle for justice in/for Palestine as an indivisible part of justice for all and insist on our right to academic freedom and campus activism.

For more information, please call or email AMED at (415) 505-2668 or amedstaf@sfsu.edu or GUPS at (415) 338-1908 or sfsugups415@gmail.com.

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