

October 16, 2023

To:

University of California Board of Regents
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In the strongest possible terms, the UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council, a diverse statewide body that represents over 300 faculty systemwide, rejects recent UC administrative communications that distort and misrepresent the unfolding genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and thereby contribute to the racist and dehumanizing erasure of Palestinian daily reality. In light of the history of statements by the UC Regents and Chancellors demonizing the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other forms of Palestinian solidarity, we have no confidence that the UC administration comprehends or respects its obligation to make public statements that demonstrate a full understanding of this historical moment. This is an egregious failure of leadership, given the University of California's reputation as one of the world's foremost educational and research institutions.

Statements issued by institutions of higher learning carry a heavy burden, as they are understood as bearing moral authority and academic expertise. It is deeply distressing that the UC and other higher education institutions' administrative statements in the last week and a half, that irresponsibly wield charges of "terrorism" and "unprovoked" aggression, have contributed to a climate that has made Palestinian students and community members unsafe, even in their own homes. These statements stoke anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian sentiments, which have resulted, for example, in the stabbing death of a six-year-old Palestinian-American boy and the serious wounding of his mother in Illinois.¹ Students organizing and attending pro-Palestinian rallies, teach-ins, and vigils at multiple UC campuses have reported racist harassment, physical threats, and violence by Zionist students, with UCPD looking on. UC administration statements that excuse Israeli genocide and erase Palestinian lives have directly

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https://www.cair.com/press_releases/breaking-cair-chicago-calls-for-hate-crime-charge-for-you-muslims-must-die-killing-of-palestinian-american-child/

contributed to this hostile climate on campus. Rather than meet the moment with intellectual honesty and an understanding of history, UC administrative communications grossly decontextualize the structure of violence, daily death and suffering, and destruction of over 75 years of settler colonialism and globally acknowledged apartheid. This near century of colonial brutality and militarized repression must be understood as a normalized condition of state terror and dehumanization.

Context is crucial. On the receiving end of Zionist militarism longer than the Israeli state's existence, the Palestinian population in the occupied territories has been subjected to a daily stranglehold by air, land and sea. Theirs is an everyday experience of terror. Failure to recognize the Palestinian freedom struggle as a struggle for basic needs, dignity, and freedom within conditions that fundamentally militate against life is part and parcel of the same logic that deems Palestinians "human animals."² It is part of a racist double standard that not only values some forms of life over others but consents to their extermination. Seventeen years of siege and continued bombing of Gaza,³ an open-air prison with a population of 2.3 million within a fully enclosed 140 square miles, amounts to ongoing genocidal collective punishment.⁴ As homes are being destroyed and white phosphorus—a war crime—has become a recurring reality, schools, hospitals, and UN buildings furnish no refuge as they have been targets of air raids for fifteen years. In the last several days, Israel has threatened ground invasions and ordered more than one million in the north to leave their homes—an impossibility, inflicting psychological warfare on Palestinians en masse.⁵ Additionally, the US military announced it's preparing to deploy 2,000 troops to Palestine, directly engaging in the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Recent years have already been the deadliest for Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and elsewhere. Indeed, prior to October 7, 2023, this year was already on record as the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank in twenty years.

A community trying to free themselves from decades-long ethnic cleansing and genocide is not the same as one of the world's strongest state militaries, a nuclear power with the unconditional backing of the United States, wielding advanced forms of technologized destruction aimed at full-spectrum dominance. To equate the two and to hold the oppressed accountable for "terrorism" reinscribes a colonial narrative that seeks to have the world believe that history began on October 7, 2023. Where were the UC administration's statements deploring the routinized lethal forms of violence inflicted on the Palestinian people prior to October 7, 2023? Instead, the UC condemned the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in its campuses as antisemitic, when BDS should instead be celebrated as a nonviolent human rights movement which follows the Black South African call for divestment during apartheid.

Our UC community is deeply affected by this ongoing war on Palestinian life. The position the UC has taken only serves to compound the harm on some of the most vulnerable members of our

²  Israel defence minister Yoav Gallant calls Palestinians in Gaza "human animals", orders total siege

³ Human Rights Watch has called Gaza an "open-air prison." see:

https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/video/2022/06/13/gaza-open-air-prison?gclid=Cj0KCQjw7JOpBhCfARisAL3bobct2nbgrYD5uH8JAIK8mztKjncUdwVXPMKkXL2wrDQOD55yixQNe-gaAqYLEALw_wcB

⁴ In 2017 the United Nations declared the overcrowded cage of Gaza "unlivable" because residents lacked electricity and clean water, and access to adequate food and medicine. See

https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gaza_10_years_later_-_11_july_2017.pdf

⁵<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/palestinians-fleeing-fighting-south-find-no-escape-danger-2023-10-15/>

community. We call on the UC administrative leadership to retract its charges of terrorism, to uplift the Palestinian freedom struggle, and to stand against Israel's war crimes against and ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Palestinian people.

Sincerely,

UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council