



ACADEMIC
COUNCIL
FOR ISRAEL



June 9, 2017

VIA E-MAIL (chancellor@uci.edu)

Chancellor Howard Gillman
University of California – Irvine
Office of the Chancellor
510 Aldrich Hall
Irvine, CA 92697

RE: Students Supporting Israel Event at UC Irvine - Disruption by Students for Justice in Palestine

Dear Chancellor Gillman,

This letter is in response to the letter sent on May 30, 2017 by the Center for Constitutional Rights, Palestine Legal, Jewish Voice for Peace, the National Lawyers Guild, and American Muslims for Palestine to the University of California Irvine (UCI) administration, and a follow up on the events where a speaking panel hosted by Students Supporting Israel (SSI) at UCI, featuring IDF veterans from the organization Reservists on Duty, was disrupted by members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at UCI.

We do not attempt in this letter to recall the events again, since there are multiple videos showcasing what happened where the administration can judge for itself, a member of the administration was present at the events, and in addition, the events were described in length in previous letters, past SSI statements, and in the media. However, **we do reaffirm yet again SSI's demand from the administration that serious actions be taken to address the behavior of SJP, a group that already received a warning in the past from the university, for a similar incident of disruptive behavior and silencing free speech.**

SJP's event that took place on campus called **"Anti-Zionism Week"** had little to do with the goal **"to educate the campus about the Palestinian struggle for freedom and equality,"** as stated in the May 30

letter. Instead, it focused on demonizing the Jewish state, denied the right of Jewish people to sovereignty, and alienated students with pro-Zionist views on campus.

During “Anti-Zionism Week” SJP tried to promote the BDS campaign, which is an attempt to target the State of Israel and internationally boycott it. **BDS was lumped in on multiple occasions next to racism and anti-Semitism both locally and internationally.** A recent international example just took place at the Swiss parliament this March. In the US, about 20 states to date are considering - or have already passed - measures against BDS, where governments are officially signing into law measures disallowing local and state governmental bodies to conduct any kind of business with companies that actively support BDS.

Students Supporting Israel has had experience dealing with chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine in various universities for the past five years since our inception as an organization. Unfortunately, what we saw in UCI is no different than a predictable pattern of behavior used by many members of this group across the country:

Step 1- **deliberate attack on free speech**, violent or aggressive silencing of Israeli and pro-Israel speakers and messages by disruption of events, as also seen in UCI this and last year; **bullying of Zionist students** on campus which includes physical intimidation of Israeli and Jewish students, as also seen in UCI with last year’s Jewish student who was forced to hide and this year; **the demonization of Zionist students and their views**, as also seen in UCI this and last year.

Step 2- **pretending innocence and acting as a victim**, as seen with the recent May 30 letter. Given such pattern of behavior, an exchange between students and veteran speakers with opposing views becomes “harassment by foreign military agents” using “racist language to attack Palestinian and Arab students”; SJP’s intentional disrupting behavior becomes “at times, students spoke spontaneously and emotionally”; and even the use of Arabic language on T-shirts is not welcomed because “the use of Arabic indicates an intent to specifically target students of Arab backgrounds,” apparently even the use of a certain language is prohibited, when it is counter to their narrative.

While we understand that UCI has to conduct its investigation, we would like to call your attention to the bigger picture. Across the nation, “Anti-Semitism skyrockets on U.S. college campuses,”¹ and “for nearly a decade, incidents of anti-Semitism have been on the rise in the University of California system and numerous other colleges in the Golden State.”² A simple google search reveals many, **many**³, incidents, too much for us to list here, where SJP groups are taking the lead with these incidents, have been practicing the silencing of Israeli speakers and intimidation of Jewish and Christian Zionist students across the country for nearly a decade and thus bluntly violating Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act as pertaining to these students.

A Wikipedia page about SJP states that “The organization **was banned** by the University of California from engaging in on-campus protests in 2002. In March 2014 the Center for Student Involvement

¹ <http://observer.com/2016/07/first-half-2016-anti-semitism-skyrockets-on-u-s-college-campuses/>

² <http://observer.com/2016/06/anti-semitism-flourishing-on-california-campuses/>

³ <http://www.amchainitiative.org/sjp-disruption-of-jewish-events/>

at Northeastern University **suspended the SJP from campus** for one year after an incident that the Center described as intimidation of fellow students.”⁴ In addition, SJP was banned or sanctioned by other universities, with the most recent example we know of happening this year in Fordham University in NY, where the Dean **denied approval of SJP to register** as an official university club citing that the group will bring “polarization” to the campus community and “specifically, the call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions of Israel presents a barrier to open dialogue and mutual learning and understanding.”⁵

While we applaud UCI’s decision last year to take action by putting SJP on probation, the group has not changed. They did not hold an educational event as required by the probation terms, and just one month after the probation ended they again disrupted SSI’s event. This shows just how little respect the group has for the administration and its fellow students. Moreover, it shows just how determined this group is to target Jewish and Christian pro-Israel students and speakers on campus. Such behavior should not be tolerated by any institution, and **we call on UCI to not make the mistake of giving SJP’s behavior a pass with yet another warning, but to stop the group from repeating misconduct, intimidation and polarization of campus by banning it.**

In addition, we would like to voice our concern about the accusations that the May 30 letter pointed towards our guest speakers’ organization Reservists on Duty. **SSI has worked in the past with the organization on multiple campuses, and in every location the events went on as planned with no disruption.** The IDF veterans shared their personal stories, engaged in productive conversations, and treated students with the utmost respect. Nothing from our experience of working with the organization even remotely resembles the description of “harassment including gender, race- and national-origin-based insults, surveillance, disruption, and physical assaults.” We suspect that this description is yet again an attempt made by SJP and its supporters to “cry wolf” where every disagreement with their narrative is labeled as racial harassment, and every attempt of theirs to silence others is labeled as legitimate protest.

Moreover, the IDF veterans who visited UCI’s campus described their experience to SSI as having been entirely contradictory to the May 30 letter. The veterans reported to us that SJP members pushed them, physically blocked their way, and even attempted to spit on them. During a demonstration that the veterans came to observe they were yelled at with slurs such as “white girl, how many people did you kill today” and “white boy, go back to Europe,” in addition to swearwords in Arabic. All these were coming from a group that claims to oppose racial attacks and profiling. At the same event, chants such as “we support the Intifada” and “long live the Intifada” were voiced repeatedly. The “Intifada” SJP students are supporting in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict means uprising which is defined in practice by brutal terror attacks against innocent Israeli civilians. The Intifadas led to the deaths of thousands of men, women and children, among them several US citizens as well. All the aforementioned incidents of SJP’s behavior as well as others were caught on camera by the IDF veterans and other students.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Students_for_Justice_in_Palestine

⁵ https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/EldredgetoSJP_12-22-16_Decision_Redacted.pdf

Thus, we call on UCI to take immediate action with regards to SJP. We look forward to hearing the results of the investigation and we hope that you will rightly decide to condemn and hold SJP accountable for their actions. SSI was created specifically because Jewish and non-Jewish pro-Israel Zionist students were being intimidated on campuses by groups like SJP and its supporters. Nationwide administrations were standing idly by and not taking any steps to make those students feel safe. We hope that UCI will not be such a case, and you will **make the right decision to stop the bullying and division on campus by SJP.**

Sincerely,

Valeria Chazin

Valeria Chazin
Students Supporting Israel National Board Chair

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Amcha Initiative
CAMERA: Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America
Hasbara Fellowships
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