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UCLA CHANCELLOR BLOCK & UC PRESIDENT NAPOLITANO RESPOND TO JEWISH COMMUNITY AND CONDEMN SJP HARRASSMENT

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SANTA CRUZ -- Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at UCLA recently launched a campaign calling for the investigation of student council members who have taken trips to Israel sponsored by Jewish organizations. SJP also demanded that candidates for student government positions sign a statement pledging that they will not go on any trip to Israel sponsored by three Jewish organizations. According to campus sources, the SJP campaign is a reaction to its failed attempt to get the student government to endorse an anti-Israel divestment resolution last February.

Shocked at UCLA's statement last week that the university did not plan to intervene, AMCHA Initiative coordinated a letter signed by seven organizations to the UC Regents, UCLA Chancellor Gene Block and UC President Janet Napolitano and spoke at the Board of Regents meeting, demanding the university officials stop SJP from targeting and harassing Jewish students at UCLA. AMCHA members and supporters also emailed and called UCLA administrators to demand action.

Chancellor Block responded to the emails and phone calls by stating:

"Just because speech is constitutionally protected doesn't mean that it is wise, fair or productive. I am troubled that the pledge sought to delegitimize educational trips offered by some organizations but not others. I am troubled that the pledge can reasonably be seen as trying to eliminate selected viewpoints from the discussion... Political speech that stigmatizes or casts aspersions on individuals or particular groups does not promote healthy debate but debases it by trying to intimidate individuals and groups...I am personally concerned any time people feel disrespected, intimidated or unfairly singled out because of their beliefs."

Chancellor Block called on the VP of Student Affairs to intervene and increase respectful dialogue on campus. In addition, Chancellor Block has agreed to meet in the near future with AMCHA Initiative and members of the other groups who have signed the letter.

President Napolitano issued her own strong statement of concern about this matter:

"I share Chancellor Block's concerns about students at UCLA who target any student seeking to participate in student government who has a relationship with, or wants to travel to, Israel on trips sponsored by certain groups. At the University of California, freedom of speech is a highly valued principle. Yet, other principles are also highly valued, including the principles of civility, respect, and inclusion, and should also govern our campuses. The actions of these students at UCLA violate these principles."

"We commend President Napolitano and Chancellor Block. These are significant first steps, although there is much more to be done," said Leila Beckwith, AMCHA co-founder and a UCLA professor. "We will be bringing our concerns about the targeting, harassment and bullying of Jewish students at UCLA to Chancellor Block when we meet with him."

The seven organizations that signed the letter to Chancellor Block, President Napolitano and the UC Regents were AMCHA Initiative, the Institute for Black Solidarity With Israel, the Lawfare Project, Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, StandWithUs and the Zionist Organization of America.

AMCHA Initiative is a non-profit organization dedicated to investigating, documenting, educating about, and combating anti-Semitism at institutions of higher education in America. AMCHA Initiative's efforts are bolstered by a network of more than 5,000 members and supporters of the Jewish community -- including university alumni, parents and grandparents, rabbis, religious school principals and synagogue members -- who have joined together to speak in one voice to ensure the safety and well-being of Jewish students on college and university campuses across the country.

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