

Letter from 13 National Organizations to Ohio University President McDavis
Re: the 'Blood Bucket Challenge' and Blood Libel Antisemitism

From: "Kenneth L. Marcus" <klmarcus@brandeiscenter.com>

Subject: Letter from 13 national organizations

Date: September 15, 2014 at 7:22:07 AM PDT

To: president@ohio.edu

President Roderick J. McDavis

Ohio University

Office of the President

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Athens, Ohio 45701

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Via Electronic Mail (president@ohio.edu)

Dear President McDavis,

We represent 13 organizations with hundreds of thousands of members and supporters nationwide, who are concerned about the campus climate and the civil rights of students at Ohio University. Some of our organizations have been approached by Ohio University students about the disturbing incident in which student body president Megan Marzec poured "blood" over herself to condemn the State of Israel. Some students have told us that they are concerned that the campus climate is worsening for Jewish students. We believe that effective action must be taken promptly to address the anti-Semitic character of this student official's actions. While we are aware of your recent statement on this subject, we think it is necessary for you to say and do more.

As you recall, several weeks ago, you challenged Ms. Marzec to the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge to raise awareness about Lou Gehrig's Disease. In a video responding to your challenge, Marzec engaged in conduct that we know you do not countenance. Rather than amplifying the charitable activity you encouraged, Marzec exploited it to spread a defamatory message about Israel that was anti-Semitic in effect, if not in intent. She dumped a bucket of "blood" (actually red paint, tomato juice and water) on her head, implying that Israel had caused a civilian blood bath during its recent defensive military operation in Gaza. Her action echoed traditional anti-Semitic defamations of Jews, known as the blood libel. Marzec had jumped to false conclusions about civilian casualties in Gaza. She also ignored the fact that Israel's military operation was an act of self-defense, necessitated by Hamas' incessant rocket attacks on Israeli civilians. Unfortunately, this is how Judeophobic blood libels have functioned historically: falsely accusing the Jewish people of murders to incite hatred against them. Ms. Marzec then promoted this video on her Facebook page, contributing to the degradation of public discourse not only at your university but also to a wider audience.

This incident should not be treated merely as a political statement made in bad taste. It must be condemned for its anti-Semitic character. Whatever Marzec's intentions may have been, her message reiterates the well-known blood libel against Jews. For centuries, Jews have been accused of killing gentiles for ritual purposes. In Medieval Europe, beginning in the Twelfth

Century, Jews were accused of using their victims' blood to bake matzah for the Jewish holiday of Passover. Similar defamations have persisted in some parts of the world to the present day. These allegations are not only hateful, false and outrageous; they also frequently have been followed by anti-Jewish riots and mass-murders. It is irrelevant whether Marzec intended to reference the blood libel, since her actions have had that effect. Regardless of her intention, her public actions reinforce and encourage age-old prejudices against Jews.

We commend the Student Senate of Ohio University for unanimously and promptly apologizing for the actions of the student president in their Twitter statement: "On behalf of the student senate, we humbly apologize for the video President Megan Marzec posted." This is an appropriate and responsible action and should be a model to student governments at other institutions of higher education.

While the student senate's leadership has been exemplary, the university community also deserves to see leadership from the university's administration. In fact, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has urged that, "university leadership should set a moral example by denouncing anti-Semitic and other hate speech..." It is imperative for university leaders to communicate the ways in which anti-Semitic stereotypes and defamations against the Jewish people can degrade the campus climate.

We understand that you have responded to this incident with a statement urging members of your university to "respect one another." You have also admonished that community members who "engage in difficult dialogues ... must do so with civility and a deep appreciation for the diverse and resilient international community in which we live." While this is an appropriate sentiment encouraging tolerance and civility, it does not condemn the hatefulness of Marzec's actions, nor does it acknowledge the harmful impact her actions have had on members of the university community. We share your belief that university leaders must, as you put it, "encourage the free exchange of ideas." At the same time, university leaders must participate in this free exchange by clarifying why certain hateful actions are inconsistent with the basic values of their institutions.

We urge you to take these steps without further delay:

- * Publicly reaffirm the university's relationship with the State of Israel including its study abroad program and Hillel birthright trips as well as its opposition to the BDS movement. This is especially important in light of the student president's assertion that she was objecting to the university's relationship to the Jewish state.

- * Speak forcefully and specifically about the university's rejection of anti-Semitic bigotry, consistent with students' rights under the First Amendment, utilizing important existing resources such as the State Department definition of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic incidents often occur under the guise of criticism of Israel, which can make them hard to identify. Some of these circumstances are described by the United States Department of State and include demonizing Israel with symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (such as the anti-Semitic blood libel), comparing Israeli policy to that of the Nazis, holding Israel to a

standard of behavior not expected of any other nation, and denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination.

* Assume responsibility for teaching how this specific incident inflames hate and bias. Specifically, this shameful event can be turned into a useful opportunity to educate your student body on the history of harmful anti-Jewish stereotypes and defamations.

We urge you to make this a learning moment and to educate the Ohio University community about Megan Marzec's anti-Semitic video and other anti-Israel conduct that promotes the hatred of Jews. We are available to work with you and your staff on how Ohio University can establish best practices for addressing such incidents. Our organizations collectively have considerable experience dealing with these matters and can provide resources to assist you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)
AMCHA Initiative
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Hasbara Fellowships
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
National Conference on Jewish Affairs
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Simon Wiesenthal Center
StandWithUs
Zionist Organization of America

Cc: Executive Vice President and Provost Pam Benoit
Dean of Students Jenny Hall-Jones
Chief of Staff Jennifer Kirksey
Ohio University Trustees
Chancellor University System of Ohio John Carey
Ohio Board of Regents
Ohio Governor John Kasich
Ohio State Representative Ron Hood (House District 78)
Ohio State Senator Lou Gentile (Senate District 30)
Ohio State Senator Peggy Lehner, Chair Senate Education Committee
Ohio State Representative Gerald L. Stebelton, Chair House Education Committee

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