

May 28, 2014

Dr. Leslie Wong, President
San Francisco State University

Dear President Wong,

The Chairs and Directors of the College of Ethnic Studies write to condemn the ongoing anti-free speech campaign being waged by the AMCHA Initiative (and others) against our colleague Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, Associate Professor of Race and Resistance Studies. Over the course of the past academic year, AMCHA has made our university and our college a spotlight in their effort to discredit and destroy anyone critical of Israel. They have especially targeted our Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative (AMED) and made wildly irresponsible allegations regarding a valued colleague in our community, Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi.

Let us be clear, this is principally a matter of academic freedom, a cornerstone of the academic enterprise. When certain subjects or viewpoints are not allowed expression or exploration, the university fails its fundamental mission. Further, it violates the constitutionally protected rights of its citizens. When noted historian Ilan Pappé was invited to speak at Fresno State in 2012, AMCHA applied pressure so that he couldn't speak. The Presidents of Fresno State, CSU San Luis Obispo, and Northridge issued an open letter stating, "Universities are places where debate, discussion, and the free exchange of ideas are welcome and encouraged. As such it is a university's responsibility to tolerate a wide range of views on issues, even if they are unpopular or minority opinions." It is to this same dynamic that Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu spoke last month when he declared "a grave concern about a wave of legislative measures in the United States aimed at punishing and intimidating those who speak their conscience and challenge the human rights violations endured by the Palestinian people." Everyone may not agree with positions discussed and debated, but a university must be a place where faculty and students are allowed to openly explore the subject free of harassment and intimidation.

As such, we are deeply troubled by the climate of hostility that exists for our colleagues and many of our students. This is especially true for Dr. Abdulhadi. The harassment that Dr. Abdulhadi experiences hampers her ability to do her professional work as she is always being forced to 'put out fires,' responding to accusation after accusation lobbed at her, or at AMED, or her students by AMCHA. Most distressing, she has also received countless threats due to the smear campaign being waged. In other words, our concerns here are more than academic. We are concerned for the literal safety of our colleague.

We are also concerned for the safety of our students. Already, we know of Arab/Arab American students who have dropped out of school as a result of the charged environment on campus. When Dr. Abdulhadi, a respected leader on campus and in the community, is confronted with threats and compelled to toil within a hostile work

environment we are not surprised that many of her students feel the same alienation and insecurity. Further, we must note, Arab/Arab American communities are taking notice of the climate on the San Francisco State campus. As stewards of the College of Ethnic Studies, an institution born out of strong campus-community connections, we are very concerned about both the short and long-term implications. We believe that as a university that highlights social justice as part of its mission, SFSU must stand-up against these attacks and protect the fundamental human and civil rights of our faculty and students.

San Francisco State prides itself on its commitment to social justice, as an endeavor that binds together our research and our teaching. We, as representatives of the College of Ethnic Studies, cannot speak more highly of Dr. Abdulhadi and the integrity with which she has labored to build AMED, to deepen dialogues on campus, and to model to students an engaged and ethical scholar. We denounce the transparent attempt to censor legitimate perspectives on the conflict in Palestine.

In light of all this, we urge you to make a strong public statement both in support of academic freedom and your commitment to protecting the rights of faculty and students to discuss and debate views that may be unpopular.

We also ask that you meet with us—the Chairs and Directors of the College of Ethnic Studies— so that we might learn what the University plans to do to assure that our colleagues are protected. We look forward to this opportunity to meet with you and collectively discuss our commitment to both free speech and safety on our campus.

Thank you.

The College of Ethnic Studies Council of Chairs and Directors