

July 1, 2014

Dear President Wong,

We, the undersigned members of Jewish communities, are writing to express our outrage at Tammi Rossman-Benjamin's vicious and baseless attacks on Professor Rabab Abdulhadi and the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative (AMED).

Rossman-Benjamin, who has a history of attacking faculty and students who are critical of Israel, claims that actions by Abdulhadi, such as leading a delegation to Palestine that highlighted the plain reality of Israeli occupation and settler-colonialism, have been "compromising the campus climate for Jewish and Israeli students at SFSU."

Abdulhadi supports and teaches about movements for justice and histories of oppressed peoples, including work that challenges anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism as well as the occupation of Palestine. As such, Abdulhadi's teaching, scholarship and public advocacy directly contribute to combatting racism and prejudice against all peoples, including Jews. Suggesting that such work creates an unsafe atmosphere for Jewish students is simply propaganda. As a matter of fact, this notion has been expressly rejected by the U.S. Department of Education at three University of California campuses in the past year, including in response to a complaint filed by AMCHA, Rossman-Benjamin's organization. The DOE concluded: "In the university environment, exposure to such robust and discordant expressions, even when personally offensive and hurtful, is a circumstance that a reasonable student in higher education may experience. In this context, the events that the complainants described do not constitute actionable harassment."

Not only are these accusations of misconduct completely unfounded, but these attacks are a reflection of politically motivated, false charges of antisemitism targeting Palestinian and Arab faculty and students around the country. On campuses from UC Berkeley to Rutgers, organizations such as the AMCHA Initiative, the Zionist Organization of America, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center have attempted to manipulate the Title VI Civil Rights Act to serve their own political ends. By characterizing protected political speech as antisemitism they cheapen and weaken crucial civil rights protections. This is but one example of the outrageous law-fare being used to target Palestinian students and professors and their supporters.

Furthermore, these attacks contribute to a domestic climate that is extremely hostile to Arabs and Muslims. From acts of vigilante violence to racist ads displayed on buses in San Francisco, New York, and DC to government use of immigration law to target well-respected Chicago community activist Rasmia Odeh, Arabs and Muslims face a climate of intimidation and repression that extends far beyond campuses.

As Jewish people well-versed in the history of antisemitism that is backed with state power, we reject Ms. Benjamin's manipulation of our history. As people committed to ending racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism and all other forms of oppression, we reject AMCHA's attempt to undermine the true meaning of racism. Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, AMCHA and similar organizations do not speak for Jews when they irresponsibly slander

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Palestinian students and faculty. In fact, their political intervention to support Israel and Zionism feeds into anti-Jewish racism by claiming that all Jews share similar views and sentiments regarding Israel.

The ignorance and anti-Arab anti-Muslim racism that Ms. Rossman-Benjamin fuels, leverages and supports is all the more reason that Professor Abdulhadi's scholarly pursuits, including research on diverse Palestinian political perspectives, offers a valuable contribution to San Francisco State University and indeed to the wider public.

We, the undersigned, urge you to do everything in your power to publicly defend Professor Abdulhadi against these false allegations and publicly acknowledge the contributions her work and the work of AMED make to SFSU.

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