



## CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM



March 16, 2016

Professor Kathleen Montgomery, Chair UC Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor Dan Hare, Chair, University-wide Academic Senate  
Anne L. Shaw, Secretary and Chief of Staff to the Regents

We call upon the Regents to reject the opening portion of its proposed statement on intolerance and bigotry that refers to “anti-Zionism” as an instance of intolerance. Although this problematic formulation comes only in the preamble, it would, if adopted, allow for the development of policies throughout the UC system that seek to suppress political viewpoints that are rightfully part of public discussion and debate. For the record, we wish to underscore that criticisms of Zionism are co-extensive with the history of Zionism and have from the start included Jewish voices from a variety of political and religious orientations. The inclusion of such a broad category as either intolerant or bigoted represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the political viewpoints critical of Zionism. Many political positions, including those that favor Palestinian rights, statehood, and political self-determination, can be considered anti-Zionist although they comply with internationally accepted norms of human rights and principles of democratic self-governance. The opposition to Zionism is very often predicated on the belief that no one religion or race should secure rights of demographic majority in a given state, that rights and freedoms should be equally protected for all people, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity, and that the power of political self-determination should be recognized for all people, regardless of their religion, race, or ethnicity. That such widely held principles of democratic self-governance, rights and obligations, are held to conflict with Zionist principles and practices is a matter that should be at the center of free and open public debate. The irony is that many viewpoints critical of Zionism are opposed to state-based forms of discrimination, bigotry, and intolerance.

The University of California ought to remain, then, an institution that does not condone or enact viewpoint discrimination and that remains committed to free and informed inquiry into political viewpoints such as these. It is widely understood that very different claims are made on behalf of Zionism and Palestinian enfranchisement and empowerment. To call one half of that debate “bigotry” and/or “intolerance” is simply to censor a political viewpoint. An open and thoughtful academic discussion on such matters requires that all such viewpoints be heard,

including those that are post-Zionist, secular, religious, or anti-Zionist, whether they are in favor of a one-state or two-state proposal, or other political alternatives for the region.

California Scholars for Academic Freedom, a group of close to 200 scholars from different academic institutions in California which is invested in protecting academic freedom of faculty, staff, and students, categorically rejects all forms of intolerance, any discriminatory treatment of Arabs and Muslim (citizens and non-citizens) faculty and students, and all attempts to curtail the free flow of ideas with regard to the Middle East. We also oppose all forms of anti-Semitism and ask for a rigorous distinction between views critical of Zionism, of the State of Israel and its policies, and those that engage forms of racism or anti-Semitism. We argue that it is precisely in these historical circumstances where the debates are difficult and urgent that we need to preserve the principle of open inquiry and debate that forms a major task of the university at this time. It is widely agreed, even in federal courts in the U.S., that there is an overriding public interest in debating the Middle East on college campuses, and therefore, acts of censorship have to be regarded with great scrutiny and care. To include “anti-Zionism” as a bigoted or intolerant position is to exercise a consequential form of political intolerance that allows the university to be driven by ideology rather than careful and informed debate.

Sincerely,

California Scholars for Academic Freedom

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\* CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM (cs4af) is a group of scholars who defend academic freedom, the right of shared governance, and the First Amendment rights of faculty and students in the academy and beyond. We recognize that violations of academic freedom anywhere are threats to academic freedom everywhere. California Scholars for Academic Freedom investigates legislative and administrative infringements on freedom of speech and assembly, and it raises the consciousness of politicians, university regents and administrators, faculty, students and the public at large through open letters, press releases, petitions, statements, and articles.