

Statement in Support of Student Speech on Palestinian Rights

When members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) randomly posted fake eviction notices on about 200 dorm room doors at Florida Atlantic University on March 30, 2012, they thought they were teaching fellow students about Israel's practice of evicting Palestinian families and demolishing their homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in violation of international law. But their action was soon the subject of an altogether different lesson. The students learned that the University was willing to bow to pressure from the campus Hillel chapter and outside organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Zionist Organization of America,¹ by opening an investigation into their peaceful action, which had been officially authorized and accompanied by University housing authorities. And some news media were willing to report falsely that the notices were posted only on the doors of Jewish students, without independently investigating the matter. Legal and administrative action was threatened, and death threats were made against some of the student activists.

After weeks of turmoil, the University rightly announced that it would not take action against the students and confirmed that there was no evidence that Jewish students were targeted by the notices. Other student Palestinian human rights activists across the country have been less fortunate, including at the University of California (UC) – Irvine, Rutgers University, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, UC-Berkeley, Brandeis and UC-Davis. Students at these and other universities have been verbally and physically intimidated, threatened, sanctioned by their universities, and even criminally charged. What they all share in common is vocal and active peaceful opposition to violations of Palestinian human rights.

We, the undersigned, condemn efforts, both on and off campus, to silence student speech in support of Palestinian rights, and affirm the First Amendment rights of students to engage in such speech. It is not anti-Semitic to criticize the conduct of the State of Israel. It is not "hate speech" to challenge violations of international law and internationally recognized human rights standards. Such criticism is no less protected because some individuals may find it upsetting. As the U.S. Supreme Court recognized in *Terminiello v. Chicago*, speech "may indeed best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to anger. Speech is often provocative and challenging. It may strike at prejudices and preconceptions and have profound unsettling effects as it presses for acceptance of an idea." Protection of free speech rights "is nowhere more vital" than on campuses. (*Keyishian v. Bd. Of Regents of Univ. of State of N.Y.*)

We urge all universities to resist outside pressure to punish students for their political speech, and to respond with the respect for students' constitutional rights that it is the university's duty to protect and to promote. For our part, we will stand by such students to defend their constitutional rights to free speech when they exercise them, and challenge attempts to silence them solely for their political views.

¹See David A. Schwartz, "Jewish Leaders Slam FAU Response," *Sun Sentinel – Florida Jewish Journal*, April 18, 2012, available at <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/florida-jewish-journal/news/palm-beach-county-news/fl-jjps-zoa-0418-20120418,0,4123320.story>.

April 25, 2012

Adalah – NY: The New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)

Asian Law Caucus (ALC)

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)

CODEPINK

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) – Florida & CAIR – San Francisco Bay Area

Committee for Open Discussion of Zionism (CODZ)

Grassroots International

International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)

National Lawyers Guild (NLG)

U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN)