



US Campaign for Palestinian Rights

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Dear President Oliver, Student Senators, and Faculty:

It was an honor to speak at Pitzer College last year at the invitation of Pitzer's Working Group on Palestine and Israel, and I particularly want to thank the chair of the WGIP, Professor Claudia Strauss, for the invitation to participate in your panel on Palestine and Israel. President Oliver, it was a great pleasure to meet and speak with you, in particular, during my visit.

I write now to urge you to endorse your motion to suspend your direct exchange program with the University of Haifa, as it proceeds to a final vote at your College Council.

Your motion is both clear and measured. It seeks to suspend Pitzer's approval of this exchange program for two reasons. First, because access to it, for Pitzer's students, exposes them to discrimination on the basis of ancestry and legitimate political speech—specifically speech in favor of the pursuit of social justice. Second, your motion looks outward beyond your own lives as faculty and students, and extends support for academic freedom to faculty and students at Palestinian universities.

Let me add that no Israeli university has acted to resist or overturn Israel's discriminatory restrictions on entry to Israel that apply to foreign students and faculty on exchanges to Israeli universities. None have acted to demand that the Israeli state extend equal academic freedom to Palestinian universities. In these ways—and others as well—**all Israeli universities are complicit institutions, and should by no means be seen as distinct from the Israeli state's discriminatory policies and actions in these matters.**

I also want to underscore the significance of this motion for Palestinians. I was surprised and greatly disappointed to hear claims that the suspension of study abroad with the University of Haifa would provide but “paltry” support for Palestinians. I can assure you that this is not the opinion of many Palestinians. **The letter your College Council received from the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees, representing the faculty and employees at thirteen universities in Palestine, makes clear that these Palestinian colleagues see the support your motion provides as very meaningful and significant.** As the executive director of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, and a Palestinian academic myself, I fully endorse that view. As is critical in all social justice movements, I encourage you to listen to the voices of the people impacted—in this case Palestinians—to hear what we believe to be in our best interest.

When I spoke at the college last year, I told the room of students, faculty and administrators that yes, the arc of the moral universe is long but we cannot expect it to bend toward justice without pulling it in that direction. I believe your college has an opportunity to be on the right side of history, which will be extremely valuable to its reputation over time.

As campus debates go on, you may hear the point that Palestinian citizens of Israel attend the University of Haifa. As a Palestinian citizen of Israel myself, I would like to address this point. As the people who lived in the land long before the modern state of Israel, Israel came to us. We did not come to Israel. The Israeli state brought a system of discrimination that was imposed on us, limiting our freedoms and choices in our homeland. **For Palestinians citizens of Israel, our realistic choices are between attending institutions complicit in the very state and systems that discriminate against us and our people, or declining any opportunity toward educational empowerment in our homeland at all.** Those who use our attendance in these institutions to promote relations with your college intentionally neglect this dynamic and lack of truly free choices to further a blatantly discriminatory system. Unlike Palestinian citizens of Israel, you—the president, student senators, and faculty of Pitzer College— have the free choice to make an ethical decision in this moment and stand on the right side of history.

I also am obliged to object to thinly-veiled insinuations of antisemitism in the attacks against the proposal to suspend the Haifa program. We must condemn antisemitism in all of its forms, in all of its manifestations. **To falsely charge antisemitism as a way of shielding Israel's oppression of Palestinians only undermines the crucial struggle against real and present antisemitism and weaponizes one form of oppression to advance another.** There can be no Palestinian exception to academic freedom, no Palestinian exception to social justice, no Palestinian exception to human rights.

The proposal you will vote on is of great, even global, importance. **What makes it so important is that it does precisely what Michelle Alexander, writing in the *New York Times* on January 19 of this year, has urged all persons of conscience to do: It acts to [“break the silence”](#) on “one of the great moral challenges of our time: the crisis in Israel-Palestine.”** When that silence is broken, when we work to end our active participation in Israel's discriminatory system, we set the stage for reaching freedom, justice, and equality.

On March 14, at your College Council meeting, you will at once vote on a measured proposal against discrimination and in favor of academic freedom. **With that same vote, you will choose between contributing to or furthering an end to the oppression of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli state and its complicit academic institutions.**

It is with confidence in your decency—and hope inspired by your actions to date—that I ask each of you who vote at Pitzer's College Council to vote “yes” on the motion to suspend Pitzer's direct enroll exchange program with the University of Haifa.

Sincerely,

Yousef Munayyer
Executive Director, USCPR