

Students for Justice in Palestine  
University of California, Los Angeles  
sjpucla1@gmail.com

November 26, 2012

Susan Swarts  
Office of the Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs  
University of California, Los Angeles

Dear Ms Swarts,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in the upcoming interfaith dinner and programming meeting. While Students for Justice in Palestine at UCLA supports dialogue between religious groups, we strongly believe that our participation would undermine our group's principles and be detrimental to our goals. Therefore as an organization we must respectfully decline this invitation. Our participation in a religious dialogue would only give legitimacy to the incorrect and dangerous myth that the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory is based on religion or religious differences.

The multiple forms of oppression against Palestinians (their dispossession in 1948, the occupation in 1967, and the ongoing discrimination against them inside Israel) are a political, not a religious issue, and must be dealt with as such. To frame these oppressions as a disagreement between Jews and Muslims is to insult those religions by condensing their long, diverse, and rich legacies into a contemporary political question that is not representative of those religions, their diverse adherents, or their long histories. Moreover, this type of framing negates and silences both Palestinian Christians and Jewish critics of Israeli policies. Finally, our student group, and the Palestinian rights movement as a whole, is comprised of individuals from a variety of racial, ethnic, sexual, and religious backgrounds. We take seriously the idea that support for Palestinian rights is a universal human concern, rather than one that is specific to any identity. Thus we cannot send a Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Atheist, or Jewish student to this event without undermining that idea and privileging one religious identity over others in our group.

We also note with great concern that administrators at this university and across the larger University of California system have continued to perpetuate the misperception that Israel's violations of Palestinian rights represent a Jewish-Muslim problem. We urge all administrators at the University of California to end this harmful and essentializing discourse.

Please feel free to contact us at any time if you have any questions or would like to speak more about this or any other issue.

Yours sincerely,

Students for Justice in Palestine at  
UCLA