

SJP-WEST

A coalition of West Coast SJP Chapters

Students respond to California Legislature censorship

July 8, 2013

SJP West (Students for Justice in Palestine)

For Immediate Release:

Billions of US tax dollars and millions of University of California tuition dollars are invested in documented human rights violations in Palestine and Israel—including but not limited to acts of collective punishment, contributing to the illegal separation wall that annexes Palestinian land, operating in illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and discriminating based on race, ethnicity and religion. Over the past year, seven UC campuses brought measures to divest from these documented human rights violations in Palestine before our student senates, including UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara, UC Santa Cruz, UC San Diego. These divestment measures—which achieved a majority of ‘yes’ votes in 5 of 7 campuses—represent a growing movement around the state towards accountability to international human rights law and a basic standard of justice.

Yet over the past year, the California State Legislature has taken an increasingly anti-democratic stance against students organizing for universal rights and justice across the state. On May 31, over 30 legislators from the California State Senate and Assembly signed a letter to the University of California Board of Regents and Chair condemning and discouraging divestment measures on our campuses. This is not the first time members of the California State Legislature has tried to silence student democracy: last summer, the State Assembly passed the HR 35 resolution, which labeled criticism of Israel’s illegal and discriminatory policies against Palestinians as “anti-Semitic” and recommended broad censorship measures of UC students and faculty advocating for Palestinian rights and justice.

Our campaigns for justice have been supported by a multitude of groups with actual concerns for these human rights, including but not limited to Arab, Asian, Black, Chicana, Christian, Filipino, Latina, Muslim and indigenous student unions, groups representing justice for queer, working-class, and impoverished people, as well as Jews and Israelis who believe in realizing universal human rights for the Palestinians. To allege that “all sides” are not being heard and that divestment and human rights are “divisive” to our campuses is a cynical erasure of the coalitional unity that all of our campaigns maintain and of the multi-million dollar lobbying apparatus and multi-billion dollar industry involved in US support for Israel’s illegal policies.

The Legislature’s letter was anti-democratic and left us with no time to respond, coming during graduation and the end of the school year for most UC students. We now feel compelled to offer our response. In an effort to demonstrate the duplicitous and deceptive actions of the Legislature, we offer the following signed letter in the words of the Legislature itself (original letter included at the bottom), with alterations when appropriate:

SJP-WEST

A coalition of West Coast SJP Chapters

July 8 2013

Dear Chair Varner and University of California Board of Regents:

As university students across the State of California, we denounce the California State Legislature for attempting to stifle student movements to divest from companies complicit in documented human rights violations in the occupied territories of Palestine.

We are concerned with the divisive impact on our university campuses caused by the California State Legislature and encourage efforts to engage the community in a more balanced and civil discussion on this issue. We are greatly embarrassed by the statement issued in May 2010 by the UC Regents' Chair and Vice Chair in conjunction with the UC President, firmly rejecting the notion of divestment from companies complicit in documented human rights violations against the Palestinian people.

The statements and resolutions such as HR 35 that have been sent or passed by various bodies of the California State Senate and Assembly fail to foster dialogue and understanding among those with different opinions. We fear that such campaigns deepen the amount of power levied against the occupied Palestinians by the occupying Israeli military, drawing Palestinians and Israelis further away from universal justice and human rights. We believe that the California State Senate Legislature's time and resources would be better invested not meddling in student democracy and encourage the legislature to work together in a productive manner.

We believe in free speech and encourage our state legislators to embrace a "true marketplace of ideas," where all voices on this important issue are adequately weighted. There are so many voices across all of our campuses that have come together in unity around the call for human rights in Palestine. We believe that young leaders in the UC system have tremendous opportunities and motivation to build a better tomorrow. We believe that the acts of the California State Legislature are stifling that potential. We are empowered to advance initiatives that foster peace, justice and reconciliation; unfortunately, the California State Legislature appears to be creating an antagonistic environment for students who support human rights, universal justice and those opposed to the blatant obstruction of these ideals.

Once again, we are shocked and appalled by our elected officials for standing firm in their refusal to divest from to the violation of universal justice and human rights and present this letter as our response to their divisive and conflict-ridden resolutions and statements.

Sincerely,

Students and citizens of California, including:

UC Berkeley Black Student Union
UC Berkeley CalSERVE Board of Directors
UC Berkeley International Socialist Organization
UC Berkeley Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/xicana de Aztlán
UC Berkeley Pilipino Academic Student Services
UC Berkeley Students for Justice in Palestine
UC Davis Students for Justice in Palestine
UC Irvine Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
UC Irvine Students for Justice in Palestine
UC Los Angeles Students for Justice in Palestine
UC Los Angeles Muslim Students Association
UC Riverside Students for Justice in Palestine
UC San Diego Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
UC San Diego Socialists
UC San Diego Students for Justice in Palestine
UC Santa Barbara Students for Justice in Palestine
UC Santa Cruz Students for Justice in Palestine
Cal Poly Pomona Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
CSU Fullerton Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
CSU Fullerton Students for Justice in Palestine
CSU San Marcos Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
La Mission College Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
San Diego State Amnesty International
San Diego State Arab Student Association
San Diego State Muslim Student Association
San Diego State Students for Justice in Palestine
San Francisco State General Union of Palestine Students
Santa Monica College Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán
Stanford International Socialist Organization
Stanford Muslim Student Awareness Network
Stanford National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Stanford Students for Palestinian Equal Rights
Stanford Students Say No To War
USC Students for Justice in Palestine

Joined by more than 800 California residents

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
95814

May 31, 2013

Sherry Lansing, Chair
and University of California Board of Regents
1111 Franklin St., 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Dear Chair Lansing and Regents:

As legislators in the California State Senate and Assembly, we join in congratulating the University of California (UC) Regents on its resolute stance against those at UC campuses pushing for divestment from both Israel and from companies doing business with Israel.

We are concerned with the divisive impact on our university campuses caused by the Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS) movement and encourage efforts to engage the community in a more balanced and civil discussion on the issue. We greatly appreciate the statement issued in May 2010 by the UC Regents' Chair and Vice Chair in conjunction with the UC President, firmly rejecting the notion of divestment from Israel or companies doing business with Israel.

The BDS campaign and resolutions such as those that have passed at several UC campuses fail to foster dialogue and understanding among those with different opinions. We fear that such campaigns deepen the division between Israelis and Palestinians, drawing them further away from a lasting peace. We believe that the UC's time and resources would be better invested in efforts to encourage all parties to work together in a proactive manner.

We believe in free speech and encourage our college campuses to embrace a true "marketplace of ideas," where all sides of an issue are adequately represented. We believe that young leaders in the UC system have tremendous opportunities and the motivation to build a better tomorrow. They should be empowered to advance initiatives that foster peace and reconciliation. The BDS movement unfortunately appears to be creating an antagonistic environment for students who support Israel and those opposed to such divisive tactics.

Once again, we thank and applaud you for standing firm in your refusal to divest in response to these divisive and conflict-ridden resolutions.

Sincerely,



DARRELL STEINBERG
President pro Tempore of the Senate



BOB BLUMENFIELD
Assemblymember, 45th District



Lansing and UC Board of Regents
May 31, 2013

John Quinn

Richard

Matt BGS

Lois Wolk

Bill Emmons

John Clark

Nannapour

Mark

Paul

Connie Conway

Mark Seidel

Ted W. T.

Catherine Salguero

Norman Eise

Mark Leo

Hannah-Johnson

Kevin de Leon

Bob Huff

R

John Hall

Phillips

Joan Buchanan

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Lansing and UC Board of Regents
May 31, 2013

Susan A. Bonilla

John C. Alden

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Angie R. R.

[Signature]

[Signature]

Kristin A. Olson

Mark S. Stein

Tom Daly

V. M. L. G.

[Signature]

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