



October 21, 2016

Robert J. Zimmer  
Office of the President, University of Chicago  
Edward H. Levi Hall, Suite 501  
5801 S. Ellis Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60637

Re: Defamatory posters targeting Students for Justice in Palestine and other advocates  
for Palestinian rights

Dear President Zimmer:

I write on behalf of University of Chicago's Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) with respect to the hateful and racist posters that appeared on the University of Chicago campus this week. The posters identify current and former members of SJP by name, calling them "terrorists" above the text "#Jewhated," for their support for Palestinian rights. We urge the University of Chicago to immediately condemn these posters, launch a thorough investigation to determine who posted them, and meet with members of SJP at the University of Chicago.

One year ago, [I wrote to you](#) to express grave concern over a pattern of harassment and intimidation targeting Palestinian students and Palestine solidarity activists at the University of Chicago. I urged you to issue a public condemnation of the harassment and to take affirmative steps necessary to ensure that Palestinian students and those who advocate for Palestinian rights can freely express their viewpoints without fear of harassment or intimidation based on their race, national origin, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Now, one year later, I write to you again. The posters that appeared on campus on Thursday, October 20 are a reminder of the hostile environment that Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students and those who advocate for Palestinian rights often face on campus. The posters were created by the David Horowitz Freedom Center, a far-right off-campus organization whose founder, David Horowitz, is labeled an extremist by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), which calls him a "driving force of the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-black movements" in America. In recent years, the Horowitz Center has become notorious for plastering campuses across California with posters that, like those found at University of Chicago, defame students and faculty using hateful language and images.

To track names of students and faculty on campus, the Horowitz Center used [Canary Mission](#), an anonymous organization that posts the names, universities, employers, and social media accounts of students and faculty who support Palestinian rights.

The Horowitz poster campaign has been almost universally criticized and has been covered by the [LA Times](#), [The Guardian](#) and [NPR](#). Pulitzer Prize-winner Junot Diaz also [expressed concern](#) over the posters. UCLA administrators, where similar posters appeared, [condemned the posters](#) as “a focused, personalized intimidation that threatens specific members” of the campus community, specifically naming SJP and the Muslim Students Association (MSA) as targets of the hateful poster campaign. This week, administrators at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where Horowitz posters also appeared, [released a public condemnation of the posters](#). The UTK statement specifically named SJP as the target of the “inflammatory” poster campaign, and defended the student group in a statement to the campus community.

SJP seeks equality and freedom for Palestinians. Criticism of the unjust policies of the Israeli government, including support for the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinian freedom, is principled human rights advocacy. It is also protected speech under the U.S. Constitution and University of Chicago policy.

Administrators have a responsibility as educators to protect and promote campus discourse on the vital human rights issues of our time, including Israel/Palestine. We commend the brave and principled students who continue to organize in the face of outside intimidation and repression. We ask you to do the same.

As you know, the appearance of these posters at the University of Chicago is not a new or isolated incident. The Horowitz Freedom Center has taken credit for multiple poster harassment campaigns on campuses across the country in recent years. As documented in recent reports by [Palestine Legal](#) and [Jewish Voice for Peace](#), these posters are part of a larger pattern of intimidation and suppression of Palestinian right advocacy. A network of well-funded pro-Israel groups across the country uses similar tactics of fear, intimidation, harassment, and misinformation to pressure administrators, stifle student voices, and chill speech on campus. Their number one tactic is to conflate criticism of Israeli policies with anti-Jewish hatred and smear social justice activists as antisemitic.

As mentioned above, this is also, unfortunately, not the only time University of Chicago students have been targeted by campaigns of intimidation and disinformation. The university’s failure to correct false accusations against advocates for Palestinian rights has a serious chilling impact on campus life. Given the sustained and defamatory intimidation campaign targeting Palestinian students and those who advocate for Palestinian rights at University of Chicago, and the national climate of [rising anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism](#), we call on the university to do more.

Palestine Legal supports SJP's demands for administrative action, including that the University of Chicago: (1) unequivocally denounce the Horowitz posters; (2) reaffirm that SJP is a student group that engages in education and peaceful advocacy for human rights; (3) launch a thorough and transparent investigation to determine who put up the posters, including a review of surveillance footage, and whether they violated university policies; and (4) arrange a meeting between yourself and SJP to learn about their experience as students at University of Chicago.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rahul Saksena', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rahul Saksena  
Palestine Legal

Cc: Kim Taylor, Vice President and General Counsel  
Michele Rasmussen, Dean of Students in the University