



CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM



February 26, 2015

Mt. San Jacinto College Diversity Committee

Subject: Miko Peled's Invitation to Speak at MSJC

Dear Diversity Committee Members,

California Scholars for Academic Freedom, an organization devoted to defending academic freedom, writes to you in support of Professor Shahla Razavi's efforts to bring author Miko Peled to your campus through funding from MSJC Diversity Committee.

California Scholars for Academic Freedom stands against the intimidation of scholars and institutions, whether on the basis of their open advocacy of unpopular or politically targeted positions or simply on the basis of the fact that their scholarship has been understood to challenge conventionally accepted political perspectives. Over the past five years we have, accordingly, spoken out against various forms of censorship, sanction, or restriction of academic freedom of speech, whether in the form of the denial of tenure, proposals to defund institutes or events, or restrictions of the freedom of students to engage in non-violent protest.

For several years, groups that support the Israeli government have waged a concerted campaign on and off university campuses to discourage and prevent speaking invitations and academic events viewed as either critical of Israel or supportive of the Palestinian rights under international law. The perspectives of even decidedly moderate voices have often times been grossly misrepresented to make them appear as extremists. Even when these efforts to interfere with free expression fail, the campaign itself diverts attention from the message to the messenger, and thereby defeats the main educational purpose of exposing university audiences to a range of views on controversial questions of public policy. The ideological agenda of the opponents of guest speakers is apparent in their insistence that "balance" be sought only when the speaker is critical of Israel. It is not the academic or ethical responsibility of a faculty member with a certain point of view to present "balance" on an issue. If the campus academic culture provides for the diversity of opinions and points of view, every member of the campus community should be able to bring their own guests/speakers free from pressure from ideological opponents.

Beyond this, the extra effort required to oppose such a campaign also often discourages campus groups in the future from inviting speakers who would arouse controversy. The overall

chilling effect is to deprive students, faculty, and the wider community from the sort of presentations that are so badly needed on sensitive issues of public concern. Part of the educational responsibility of academic communities is to encourage engaged citizenship, which depends on access to a range of viewpoints in the marketplace of ideas.

Based on the above concerns, we call on the Diversity Committee to resist caving in to the harassment by some faculty members, support Professor Razavi's efforts to bring intellectual stimulation to MSJC, and to fund her speaking event of author Miko Peled as proposed.

Respectfully,

Contacts:

Lisa Rofel, Ph.D.

lrofel@ucsc.edu

University of California, Santa Cruz

Dennis Kortheuer, Ph.D.

dennis.kortheuer@csulb.edu

Emeritus, Cal State Long Beach

Katherine King, Ph.D.

king@humnet.ucla.edu

University of California at Los Angeles

California Scholars for Academic Freedom*

** CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM is a group of more than 150 scholars who defend academic freedom, the right of shared governance, and the First Amendment rights of faculty and students in the academy and beyond. We recognize that violations of academic freedom anywhere are threats to academic freedom everywhere. California Scholars for Academic Freedom investigates legislative and administrative infringements on freedom of speech and assembly, and it raises the consciousness of politicians, university regents and administrators, faculty, students and the public at large through open letters, press releases, petitions, statements, and articles.