



To:

Dr. Lori G. Kletzer
Campus Provost
Executive Vice Chancellor

September 20, 2023

Dear Dr. Kletzer:

We write to express serious concern with the University of California Santa Cruz's (UCSC) public [condemnation](#) of the Institute for Critical Study of Zionism's (ICSZ) upcoming convening, scheduled for October 13th and 14th at UCSC and New York University (NYU), respectively.

The ICSZ was founded by a group of academics that includes Palestinians, Israelis, American Jews, scholars of color, and other advocates for racial justice, including at UCSC. "Battling the 'IHRA definition': Theory & Activism" is a working meeting of the Institute's community of scholars and activists, aimed at combating dangerous efforts to use a [distorted definition](#) of antisemitism to silence advocacy for Palestinian rights. The convening has been planned by several UCSC professors, is co-sponsored by the Center for Creative Ecologies, the Center for Racial Justice, and the Critical Race & Ethnic Studies Department at UCSC, and will be attended by UCSC faculty and students. Its purpose is to build knowledge and share strategies amongst the wide array of people organizing against malicious attempts to falsely smear advocacy for Palestinian rights as antisemitic.

Implying that this convening is itself antisemitic and improper in the university's academic sphere, as UCSC did in its September 5th statement, risks running afoul of the university's First Amendment obligations and commitment to academic freedom. While the statement ostensibly

acknowledges disagreement, its framing of the dispute as one over whether the goals of the conference are antisemitic, as opposed to whether Zionism is a settler colonial racial project, is not neutral. Indeed, by echoing the false conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism advocated by right-wing, anti-Palestinian organizations, and by disproportionately scrutinizing organizing and research in support of Palestinian rights and singling out such work for censure, UCSC is creating an unsafe educational environment for Palestinians and academics whose research touches on the repression of Palestinian rights, and inviting further harassment of the community members involved in ICSZ. Further action from UCSC administration to suppress organizing and academic work in support of Palestinian rights on its campus would likely violate the First Amendment as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The administration's double standard when it comes to speech critical of Israel is clear: its condemnation of ICSZ purports to take issue with the conference's points of unity, stating that the conference's decision to establish a framework for discussion is "antithetical to UC Santa Cruz values." These points of unity define Zionism as support for a settler colonial project based on race, a view that is supported by ample contemporary scholarship, as well as the [writings](#) of the movement's founders. Opposition to the political ideology of Zionism—whether espoused by Palestinians, Jews, or anyone else—is the call for equal rights for all residents of historic Palestine currently living under Israeli rule, and an end to the occupation and other forms of Israeli demographic control. Palestinians who have experienced the harms of Zionism firsthand over the course of decades of dispossession, discrimination, and military occupation, have articulated strong anti-Zionist critiques that make clear that opposition to Zionism has nothing to do with the Jewish religion or ethnicity, even if it is misperceived that way. People across the world share these critiques based on Israel's ongoing racist colonial project.

In contrast to its treatment of ICSZ, the administration has never condemned Santa Cruz Hillel, an organization with [standards of partnership](#) that prohibit it from hosting anti-Zionists and which regularly co-sponsors events with university organizations. These standards bar Hillel from partnering with organizations or inviting any individual that "delegitimizes" Israel. Indeed, earlier this summer, UCSC announced [its partnership with Hillel](#), a partnership that—according to Hillel's protocols—requires alignment with its organizational opposition to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign. As such, we are left to conclude that the "values" the administration's statement refers to have less to do with free expression than with opposing advocacy for Palestinian rights.

Furthermore, the September 5th statement (which was updated on September 8th) will only serve to exacerbate the ongoing harassment of advocates for Palestinian rights at UCSC—to whom the administration has refused to provide support—and chill future expression of solidarity with Palestinians. In addition to smears published in the conservative press, conference organizers have faced attacks by email, including ominous racist and misogynistic hate mail, and efforts by

outside organizations to dissuade community partners from participating in university programs under their management. By aligning with those outside organizations and individuals and failing to support targeted faculty, UCSC has contributed to the reputational damage of those faculty and imperiled their community-collaborative projects. To truly embody the spirit of academic freedom, UCSC should be protecting its community members from politically-motivated harassment, not inviting it.

UCSC must ensure that all of its community members, including those who advocate for Palestinian rights, are able to engage in political organizing and knowledge production free of interference. As such, we call on UCSC to retract the September 5th statement, apologize to the ICSZ organizers, issue a statement agreeing not to discriminate against Palestinians or those who advocate for their equality, and refrain from any further unwarranted intervention into the academic work of UCSC professors and students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dylan Saba', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dylan Saba
Staff Attorney
Palestine Legal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria C LaHood', with a cursive script.

Maria LaHood
Deputy Legal Director
Center for Constitutional Rights