

## Jewish Voice for Peace-Los Angeles

8 June 2022

Chancellor Byron D. Clift Breland  
North Orange County Community College District  
1830 W. Romneya Drive  
Anaheim, CA 92801  
by email to [chancellor@nocccd.edu](mailto:chancellor@nocccd.edu)

Dear Chancellor Breland:

We write on behalf of Jewish Voice for Peace-Los Angeles (JVP-LA) to express our concerns regarding your email of May 26, which criticizes the intellectually honest and ethically urgent SWANA statement responding to the recent killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Unfortunately, the email of May 26 rests on misinformation and, as a consequence, embraces a position of animus toward the struggle for freedom and other human rights for Palestinians. In so doing, moreover, it contributes to a hostile campus environment for Palestinian-identified faculty, students, and staff, and their allies.

Jewish Voice for Peace-LA is the Los Angeles chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a national organization with more than 250,000 members and supporters. JVP stands firmly against all racisms, and within this social justice project is especially committed to supporting the Palestinian struggle against Zionism. As Jews, we understand that “never again” must mean “never again to anyone”; as Jews, we know that the sole reliable protection against antisemitism is through solidarity with all who suffer from oppression and injustice, not by participation in a project of racial supremacy and state domination.

Several points are key in this matter. The first is that criticisms of the Israeli state and of Zionism are not antisemitic. Here consider that over the last 18 months, the world’s two leading human rights organizations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have both issued reports that meticulously document that the state of Israel—from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea—exists not as a democracy, but as an apartheid regime that denies human liberty and equality to Palestinians, in violation of international law.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, [Crime of Apartheid: the Government of Israel’s System of Oppression Against Palestinians](#) (2022); Human Rights Watch, [A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution](#) (2021). See also the report of the leading Israeli human rights organization, B’Tselem: [A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea](#) (2021).

Criticizing the Israeli apartheid state is, in fact, the very antithesis of antisemitism. It is an act of radical love in support of human freedom and social justice. Claims that criticisms of the Israeli state are antisemitic and “Jew hatred” are intellectual fraud in the service of silencing those criticisms and shielding the Israeli state from accountability for its seventy-four years of oppression of Palestinians. Those who make and repeat such claims are simply denying the abundant facts documented by Amnesty and Human Rights Watch—just as corporations such as Exxon spent years lying to us about the established science of fossil fueled climate change and, in an earlier era, the tobacco companies lied to us about the established science of smoking their lethal product.

As for anti-Zionism, here too the charge of antisemitism is intellectual fraud in the service of oppression: Jewish Voice for Peace is itself a proudly anti-Zionist organization. As the great twentieth-century social theorist Edward Said argued, actually existing Zionism has, from its onset in the late 1800s, been a project of ethnic cleansing and European settler colonialism, at the expense of the rights and lives of the indigenous population of Palestine.<sup>2</sup> This remains true until now, as evidenced, for instance, by the Israeli military’s violent demolitions, just last week, of the homes of 21 residents in Masafer Yatta, and its shooting and killing, since January 1 of this year, of 13 Palestinian children in the West Bank.<sup>3</sup> Miserably, we could give many more contemporary examples. But let us emphasize that Zionism is a specific variant of political-nationalism (an invention of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and not something that emerged from Judaism or its faith precepts.<sup>4</sup>

Precisely because NOCCCD is an educational institution, it is important to note that the dishonest attacks on the SWANA statement are acts that chill campus speech and trample the academic freedom of faculty and students who speak honestly about Palestine and Israel. This key point is spelled out in a recent statement from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which holds both that criticisms of the Israeli state are *not* antisemitic and that when such charges are lodged against those criticisms the charges themselves constitute a serious threat to “free speech and academic freedom.”<sup>5</sup>

It is worth observing that a notable source of support for the view rejected by the AAUP is the ADL, the so-called Anti-Defamation League. In reality a pro-apartheid organization, the ADL defines criticisms of Israel and of Zionism as antisemitism, thus circulating wildly inflated statistics about the prevalence of antisemitism on our campuses and in US society. The ADL’s methodology is no different than counting criticisms of white supremacy as criticisms of

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Said, “Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims,” *Social Text* (1979).

<sup>3</sup> On Masafer Yatta see “Ahead of Biden Visit, Israel Launches Biggest Evictions of Palestinians in Decades,” *Washington Post* (May 22, 2022); and on the Israeli military’s murder of Palestine children in the West Bank, read through <https://www.dci-palestine.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (2009).

<sup>5</sup> AAUP, “[Legislative Threats to Academic Freedom: Redefinitions of Antisemitism and Racism](#)” (March 2022).

white persons (which is, in fact, precisely the response to the Black Lives Matter movement held by the grievance-right in US society today).<sup>6</sup>

We must add that the “crying wolf” charges of antisemitism in support of the Israeli state themselves undermine, by diverting resources and sowing confusion, the struggle against actually existing antisemitism. It is such attacks—including the attack on the SWANA statement—that endanger us as Jews, not criticisms of the Israeli state or of Zionism.

Related to this, as a proudly Jewish organization, we must take exception to the May 26 email’s claim the NOCCCD Board of Trustees has heard from “the Orange County Jewish community.” We understand that you heard from supporters—Jewish supporters in many cases—of the Israeli apartheid regime; but identifying these (or other) apologists for apartheid as representing the “Jewish community” (of any region) erases and disrespects Jews who stand against Zionism and the Israeli apartheid state.

Speaking as a faculty member of 36 years just a bit north of Orange County, I can tell you that fewer and fewer Jewish undergraduates support Israel and identify as Zionists—and this observation is also supported by national polling data.<sup>7</sup> Why? Because these young Jews are not willing to allow ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism, and apartheid to be carried out in our Jewish name.

Finally, let us focus on the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh. The only active guns within firing range of Shireen were the guns of the Israeli occupation forces, and the bullet’s site of entry into her body was the specific space between her protective jacket and the helmet she was wearing. Indeed, the sole independent investigation of the incident to date, by CNN, has concluded that the available evidence indicates a “targeted” assassination by the Israeli occupation forces.<sup>8</sup> Such extra-judicial killing—of anyone, anywhere, at anytime—is indefensible. And so is the attack on the SWANA statement and its removal from the SWANA website.

The rationale provided for that removal in the May 26 email is, moreover, a mare’s nest of confusion and pseudo-legalisms; more simply: it is a thinly disguised attack on intellectually honest speech that falls entirely within academic freedom protections.

For all of these reasons, we call on you to join JVP-LA and SWANA in support of academic freedom and a NOCCD campus environment free of hostility to Palestinian-identified students,

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the ADL, including its role in promoting discriminatory violent policing of Black and Brown communities in the US, see <https://droptheadl.org/> and <https://deadlyexchange.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> “[Young Jewish Americans Question Boomer Consensus on Israel](#),” *Bloomberg* (June 2021); for an early recognition that US Jews reaching adulthood in this century are increasingly critical of and disaffected from the Israeli state, see Peter Beinart, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment” (June 2010).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/24/middleeast/shireen-abu-akleh-jenin-killing-investigation-cmd-intl/index.html>

faculty, staff, and their allies. We urge you, in short, to publicly rescind the May 26 email and to re-post the SWANA statement, both on a timely basis.

JVP-LA stands unapologetically *for* justice for Shireen Abu Akleh and accountability for her murder; JVP-LA stands unapologetically *against* fake charges of antisemitism in fealty to the Israeli apartheid state; JVP-LA stands unapologetically *for* academic freedom and Palestinian freedom—and we stand unapologetically in our admiration for the intellectual integrity and moral courage of SWANA in its struggle to support a genuinely inclusive NOCCCD campus environment and a broader world of *positive peace*, to borrow the Reverend King’s formulation.

Shalom,

Daniel A. Segal, on behalf of Jewish Voice for Peace-Los Angeles  
Jean M. Pitzer Professor of Anthropology & Professor of History, Pitzer College of the Claremont Consortium of Colleges  
Past Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University  
Past President, Society for Cultural Anthropology

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