



Jewish Voice for Peace, Los Angeles

25 August 2021

Michael Ciecek, Principal
Becca Freeland, Dean of Students
Orange County School of the Arts

Dear Principal Ciecek and Dean Freeland:

Jewish Voice for Peace-Los Angeles (JVP-LA) offers its full and admiring support to the students of the Building Bridges Club at OCSA, specifically for their commitment to organize OCSA campus events that offer honest and urgently needed discussion of the Palestinian struggle for freedom and equality. We are dismayed that the OCSA administration has trampled the students' First Amendment rights, thus shielding the Israeli state from legitimate scrutiny in regard to its severe and pervasive violations of the human rights of Palestinians.

First amendment rights must protect the speech of all political views, but it is particularly disturbing when they are set aside to stifle speech that speaks unpopular truths in support of human freedom—as the OCSA administration has done in this case. JVP-LA has heard that there was particular concern by some OCSA stakeholders regarding the proclamation: “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free.” There can be no question that this is fully protected speech, and it is important to recognize that this is not, by any honest and reasonable understanding, an anti-Semitic statement or anti-Jewish in any way: Palestinian freedom is never, in any location, a threat to Jewish freedom—just as Black freedom is never, anywhere, a threat to white freedom. Indeed, the contrary is the case: the denial of freedom to some, as to Palestinians and African-Americans, always diminishes and degrades the freedom of others. Let us speak plainly then: we in Jewish Voice for Peace-LA do not merely defend but fully and proudly embrace the proclamation, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free” —exactly as we also fully and proudly embrace the view that from sea to shining sea, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and everywhere else in the world, *Black Lives Matter*.

The wrongfulness of the OCSA administration's restraint on legitimate and pro-social justice speech in this case is highlighted and exacerbated by the fact that the OCSA administration permits the school's Israel Club to operate freely. The Israel Club fully deserves First Amendment protections of course. And we, for our part, would love to know more about that club and its events, especially those concerned with occupied Palestine. A robustly democratic and free society requires fierce protection of speech rights and, with this, rigorous scrutiny of all speech—just as there must be such protection and scrutiny, for instance, for speech that denies the reality of our unfolding climate catastrophe.

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In regard to the crucial point that students do not leave their First Amendment protections at the school yard gate, we urge you to re-read the US Supreme Court's majority opinion in *Tinker v Des Moines* (1969).

We also hope that, on reflection, you will judge that the lives and oppression of Palestinians merit your careful study as educators and, most importantly, as human beings. In this regard, we encourage you to read through the "resources" sections on both [the national JVP website](#) and [the website of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights](#). We also recommend the recent report, *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, issued by Human Rights Watch, one of the world's leading human rights organizations; and finally, *A Regime of Jewish Supremacism from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid*, issued by B'Tselem, the leading Israeli human rights organization.

Jewish Voice for Peace-LA is the Los Angeles chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a national organization with some 250,000 members and supporters. JVP stands firmly against all racisms, and within this larger 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 sound and legitimate protection against antisemitism is via solidarity with all who suffer from injustice, not by participation in a project of state domination of others.

We urge the OCSA administration to immediately reverse the restrictions it has placed on the Building Bridges Club and its events. We also urge the administration to make a public statement to all stakeholders acknowledging its error in trampling the US Constitution's First Amendment protections and specifically the speech rights of the courageous social justice students of Building Bridges. We stand with and are inspired by those great students.

We hope that moving forward, OCSA will fulfill its mission as an educational institution to foster open and honest inquiry into, and discussion of, the Israeli apartheid state and the Palestinian struggle for freedom and equality in relation to that state. Please know that we at Jewish Voice for Peace-LA are available to support your great school in that urgent educational endeavor.

Sincerely, and on behalf of Jewish Voice for Peace-LA,

Daniel A. Segal
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Pitzer College of the Claremont Colleges
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Estee Chandler
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COPIES: Teren Shaffer, OCSA President and CEO; Gary Humphrey, Halim Dhandina, Hessica Herthel, Paul Slatkin, and Vincent Foley, OCSA Trustees; and Mia Soumbasakis, Kaon Suh, Dylan de Duzman, and Friends of Building Bridges at OCSA.