

An Open Letter to the UCLA Community from UCLA Jewish Faculty and Staff

<https://sites.google.com/view/ucla-jewish-faculty-staff/home>

We are Jewish faculty and staff at UCLA, of various degrees of religious observance and cultural practice, various racial and class backgrounds, and from multiple parts of the world. We are also Jews of different political persuasions, including but not limited to Jews who are anti-Zionist, non-Zionist, and Zionist.

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block has recently shared a number of messages with the campus community. Chancellor Block has spoken of his concerns about the fear experienced by “Jewish students” and has drawn a supposed connection between addressing campus antisemitism and dismantling the encampment in front of Royce Hall. In doing so, he (mis)used Jews as justification for the arrest of those associated with Students for Justice in Palestine and their sister organizations, including Jewish Voice for Peace, among others. These statements and actions have upset us, not least because we notice a tendency to treat Jewish people on campus as a homogenous bloc despite our many backgrounds, convictions, and experiences. A great deal is being said in our name, without our consent.

We agree on the following statements in light of the events that occurred on our campus between April 30 and May 2, 2024:

1. Amnesty for arrested protesters: We call on the university to ensure that all students, faculty, and staff who were arrested for being part of or in solidarity with the encampment are provided with full amnesty and are assured that they will not be targeted again by UCLA or any UC administrators for engaging in peaceful protest.

2. Chancellor Block was wrong to attribute violence to the encampment: We call on UCLA Chancellor Block to acknowledge publicly the harm he has done to the Palestinian Solidarity Community and to the campus by placing blame on the encampment for the violence directed against the encamped students. Documentary evidence and many witnesses, including faculty among us, confirm the origins of the violence: Violence was initiated and carried out primarily by outside attackers who were not UCLA students, including some self-identified Zionists and some white nationalist aggressors, and did not originate in the encampment.

3. Critiques of Israel are not presumptively antisemitic: Israel does not represent all Jews. While the signatories have profound disagreements about the State of Israel, we agree that it is dangerous to frame all critiques of the state or government of Israel, or all critiques of Zionism, as antisemitic.

4. Jews who support the liberation of Palestine must not be devalued: We reject the notion that those Jews who embrace and work with the people of Palestine, whether in Palestine or in the United States, have sacrificed their Jewishness. We emphasize the view that many Jews who embrace pro-Palestinian work regard themselves as fully Jewish and act as Jewish people of conscience. We also reject the narrative pitting Jews against pro-Palestine protesters. This narrative ignores the diversity of the Jewish community and the presence of Jews within the

protest movement.

5. Acknowledging the encampment: Some of those signing are among those who treasure and celebrate the presence of the encampment and who respect the encamped students for their courage, potency, discipline, stamina, and passion. All of us recognize the importance of non-violent student speech and freedom of expression on a wide range of issues, whether or not we all agree with particular expressions.

6. Freedom from harassment: All UCLA students have a right to pursue their studies, follow their interests, and peacefully express themselves without fear of intimidation or attack from police, security staff, other students, faculty and staff, the university administration, or outside community members.

7. Ceasefire and Student Activism for Palestine: We support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, unconditionally. We strongly support the provision of resources needed to rebuild Gaza and to support the surviving people of Gaza, including but not limited to humanitarian aid. We encourage the University of California administration to engage in meaningful dialogue with the pro-Palestinian protesters about the content and context of their demands (including divestment) and the role that the UC can play in promoting peace and justice. Some of those signing have asked that we also specify that the hostages still held by Hamas should be released. We do so, and we simultaneously emphasize that the people living and dying in Gaza are not collectively responsible for hostage-taking, or for the actions of Hamas, or any organization.

In solidarity and in hope for a just future,

78 total signatories

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