



April 20, 2021

President Michael V. Drake
University of California
Office of the President
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607

via email: president@ucop.edu

Dear President Drake,

We write as chair of the Advisory Board, Executive Director, and Deputy Executive Director, respectively, of the [Academic Engagement Network \(AEN\)](#) to express our deep concern regarding a “[virtual open classroom](#)” scheduled for April 23 which will feature as a guest speaker the [convicted terrorist Leila Khaled](#), reportedly a current member of the Jordanian command of the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

We stand with many other civil rights and Jewish groups, including San Francisco Hillel and the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Relations Council, which in recent days have [expressed alarm](#) that by platforming, amplifying and normalizing violent rhetoric, this event will negatively impact the campus climate for Jewish, Israeli and Zionist students.

AEN is an independent and non-partisan national organization of over 750 faculty members on more than 250 campuses. AEN seeks to counter the delegitimization of Israel on campus, helps to defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promotes robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and responds to antisemitism on campus when it occurs. Chaired by Mark G. Yudof, prominent university leaders and distinguished scholars serve on AEN’s [Advisory Board](#), including Irwin Cotler, Scott Cowen, Roger D. Kornberg, and Deborah E. Lipstadt, among others. Two members of our Advisory Board are senior faculty at UC Irvine and UC Berkeley. In addition, dozens of University of California faculty are longtime members of AEN.

According to its advance [publicity](#), the April 23 event, “Whose Narratives? What Free Speech for Palestine?” is co-sponsored by the University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI), the Council of University of California Faculty Associations (CUCFA), and San Francisco State University’s Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies Program (AMED). It is co-moderated by AMED’s Director and Associate Professor Rabab Abdulhadi, Tomomi Kinukawa, a Faculty Lecturer in Women and Gender Studies at SFSU, and University of California Merced Professor Sean L. Malloy (History and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies). The host of the event link is UC Merced.

Leila Khaled was the mastermind behind several airplane hijackings in 1969 and 1970, during which a flight attendant was shot and one of her accomplices was killed by security officials. Furthermore, in [recent interviews and event appearances](#) Khaled has repeatedly promoted terror violence against unarmed

civilians. While serving in its leadership, the PFLP has been responsible for numerous [bombing operations](#) and [attacks](#) that have killed American citizens and scores of Israeli civilians.

We are concerned that Khaled and the PFLP will likely be glorified and celebrated at this week's event because SFSU's Professor Abdulhadi has a troubling [track record](#) of praising Khaled and promoting PFLP's illegal activities in campus events that she has recently hosted. In September 2020, for example, Abdulhadi reportedly [told](#) a San Francisco newspaper that "We really idolize somebody like Leila Khaled...somebody who actually stands up for herself, speaks for herself, actually goes to a plane and hijacks it..."

We support the ability of faculty to conduct their teaching free of censorship. We also support vigorous, reasoned discussion and debate on contentious issues as way to advance the core mission of the university. While pedagogic choices can be criticized, we believe that faculty are responsible for deciding what topics will be studied and discussed in their courses and what guest speakers will be invited into their classrooms. As for incendiary speakers, we cannot allow what we regard as vile and offensive speech to lead us to abandon the cherished value of free expression. But the same right that permits speakers to engage in hateful commentary also protects the right and duty of university leaders to condemn these merchants of hatred when they come into our campus community.

At AEN we remain committed to the principle of balancing academic freedom and the protection of free speech with strategies to foster a campus environment where all students, faculty, staff members and guests can feel respected. It is for this reason that we have long [supported](#) the *Principles Against Intolerance* established by the UC Board of Regents in 2016, viewing it as a path-breaking step forward in improving the campus climate for Jewish and all students. But as we have also noted, the Principles provide no concrete guidance on implementation. It is up to university administrators to set the tone and to take the lead in fostering an atmosphere of civility, respect and tolerance.

As you continue to work to ensure that the ten campuses in the UC system provide an inclusive and welcoming place for students from all backgrounds, please do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely yours,



Mark G. Yudof | Chair, Advisory Board
(510) 409-2484
mark@academicengagement.org



Miriam F. Elman | Executive Director
(315) 956-0725
miriam@academicengagement.org



Michael B. Atkins | Deputy Executive Director
(914) 830-1102
mike@academicengagement.org

cc: John A. Pérez, Chair, UC Board of Regents (regentsoffice@ucop.edu); Chancellor Juan Sánchez Muñoz, UC Merced (chancellormunoz@ucmerced.edu); David Theo Goldberg, Director, University of California Humanities Research Institute (goldberg@uci.edu)