

New York City Palestinian educator witch-hunted by right-wing media for speaking out on Gaza genocide

Sandy English
17 October 2023

Earlier this week, the right-wing media began a campaign of slander and censorship against a New York City Palestinian teacher who called out the pro-Zionist advice emailed to all teachers by Chancellor David Banks, an appointee of Democratic Mayor Eric Adams.

Math teacher Mohammad Jihad Ahmad wrote on X/Twitter: “So-called ‘Israel’ has continually indiscriminately killed civilians, children, the elderly, the press, and medical workers and targeted schools, places of worship, and medical facilities ... Now [Banks] has the time to send us Zionist propaganda to our official work emails.”

The *New York Post*, without contacting Ahmad, wrote a scurrilous and lying piece identifying him with antisemitism. The gutter organ of the Murdoch family published the name of Ahmad’s school. The witch-hunt was inflamed on X/Twitter by various Zionist and fascist forces and then further exacerbated by an article on Fox News, as described below. Ahmed and his family have received death threats.

When he was contacted by Fox News, Ahmad said, in a statement published on social media: “For the last 75 years so-called Israel has continued to exist though continued dispossession, ethnic cleansing and incremental genocide. As is supported by the UNGA resolution 37/43 (1982), the oppressed people of Palestine have a right to armed resistance against their oppressor.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Mohammad Ahmad on Monday.

Sandy English: Can you describe what happened?

Mohammad Ahmad: Earlier this week all teachers received an email from the [New York City Schools] chancellor [David Banks] with one-sided Zionist resources, ignoring the Palestinian side of the conversation.

I felt that he was echoing the mayor’s view which was basically normalizing extermination of Palestinians in Gaza and equating people at rallies to terrorists. I felt that the chancellor was approaching me at work and echoing this sentiment so I condemned him on Twitter. I took a screenshot of the email that all teachers received with the Zionist resources, and I condemned him for this and how he was approaching this

conversation.

And then Saturday morning I received a text message from a friend that the *New York Post* wrote an article about me. The *Post* had not reached out to me for comment, and they just published this one tweet of mine and found an image of my face from my personal Facebook profile. They had trawled through my Twitter, and then they compiled an article with me at the center. They misconstrued what I said in a very anti-Jewish light, which is not at all what I’m saying.

Then came the simple Twitter harassment, and then Fox News picked it up and reached out to me for comment. I’m not a public figure, so I didn’t know how to approach this. I thought, well, this is a good opportunity because the *New York Post* didn’t reach out to me for comment. This is a chance for me to kind of explain myself. And so, I sent Fox News a lengthy response. They literally clipped three words from it and wrote a whole article. And that’s when it became national, and it started getting desperate.

SE: How is your family reacting to this?

MA: We’re pretty rattled. We’re just trying to be cautious now in the wake of the death threats we have received. There are some pretty vile death threats against me and my family. And it’s unsettling.

SE: What do you think the purpose of this campaign by the right-wing media is?

MA: I think there’s multiple levels to it. The *Post* is notoriously anti-education, right? I think that they needed to paint the boogeyman in the education system, and so they picked me. I think it’s also meant to silence me, and to use me as an example to people who might vocalize similar opinions. At one point yesterday, I got a barrage of messages on Twitter that said, delete your account, delete your account. It’s a bullying tactic to get me to go silent and either delete my account or go private or whatever.

Fox News exists on sensationalism and witch-hunting, and I think they found a person that they thought had no resources to support them because there are plenty of people with relative power that have said what I’ve said, but I’m just a teacher, and they decided to make a punching bag out of me.

SE: Do you fear for your job?

MA: I don't. I actually met with my principal this morning because I wanted to face it head on. And she was very supportive. But this can be really stressful because now families are contacting her. They're worried and they want to pick the kids up early. They are concerned that the school building is not safe, and crazies might want to come for me, then they might be coming to the building and that puts children in danger.

I expressed my beliefs to her, and she said that I have the right to express my views. Not that I feel like it needs to be said every time, but I have Jewish people in my family. I don't have an anti-Jewish bone in my body. Everything that I've said has been in the criticism of Israel and Zionism and ongoing murder of just innocent people. But that's being misconstrued. She told me that my job currently isn't in jeopardy and unless the district decides that.

SE: Why did you speak out?

MA: To counter the propaganda campaigns that seek to dehumanize Palestinians. I've been speaking out against like this since I was little because I grew up in South Florida and there's a large population of Zionists. In my home, people are dying, and I think part of what I can do is spread the truth of what is happening.

SE: How have other teachers reacted to the witch-hunt against you?

MA: I have had a few colleagues approach me this morning and tell me that they support me. Some have even said they support everything that I have to say. But others have said we support your right to have your own opinion and be able to voice it. A student told me, "I just wanna let you know that I support you but right now I don't wanna be subject of bullying either."

SE: What do you think of the role Mayor Adams has played?

MA: He stands to gain a lot of benefit through his ties to Israel. Monetary benefit, as we've seen. He routinely takes trips there and is treated to the lap of luxury. So, his perspective is morally compromised because he's not thinking about the human and the humanitarian implication of what's happening to Palestinians. He's more concerned with his own personal gain.

Israel is a bastion of Western military industrial hegemony in Southwest Asia. The teargas that was used against the George Floyd protests [of 2020], it was first tested on Palestinians. The sound weapons that the NYPD used on protesters here were first tested on Palestinians by Israel and a lot of the military gear that spreads throughout the world is first tested on Palestinians. Adams is just echoing the same Western, militaristic perspective that Joe Biden espouses and many leaders in the Western world, such as France and England, and so on do.

SE: Have you followed Biden's threats against Iran?

MA: I think Iran is a convenient boogeyman to the US

government. It used to be Saudi Arabia, but Saudi Arabia is where oil comes from and is now positioning itself as a power that the US wants to align to. The United States doesn't care about the morality of their positioning. It cares about what serves its imperial game. There are plenty of problems in Iran that we can point to, but what the US cares about is that Iran has military power in Southwest Asia, and that it challenges Western might in that region.

SE: If you had your ideal classroom to teach and you could tell students the truth, and I'm not suggesting that you will do this in the present circumstances—what would you say?

MA: If I could talk to somebody who doesn't know anything about the situation, where would I start then? What would I begin with? I think I would start with a historical conversation, especially in school. I think it's appropriate because we teach history in school and analyzing history and drawing conclusions from historical events and how social events are portrayed.

I would start before World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the colonization of the Levantine region by Great Britain and France, and then the effects of that colonization, because today ultimately Israel is a product of British colonization.

From there you get into the more complex conversations about what happened in 1948 for the coordinated terrorist attacks that obliterated whole villages.

* * *

While Ahmad says that his building representative has been supportive, it is noteworthy that the United Federation of Teachers has not seen fit to comment on this vile attack on one of its members or to come to the defense of the Palestinian people.

The attack on Mohammad Ahmad is an attack on the democratic rights of all educators, who have been ravaged by the conditions created by the pandemic, who have been exposed to the systematic state lying about COVID-19 for three years now, and who will bear the brunt of budget cuts to education as American imperialism goes forward with its plans for war against Russia, China, and now Iran.

Those educators who wish to defend Mohammed Ahmed and the democratic rights of all teachers need a genuinely independent organization that will also wage the fight against war and austerity. They should contact the Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee immediately.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact