

# Three Palestinian students shot in Burlington, Vermont in suspected hate crime

Jacob Crosse

26 November 2023

On Saturday evening, three university students and lifelong friends of Palestinian descent walking together on their way to enjoy a family holiday dinner were shot in a suspected hate crime in Burlington, Vermont. Two of the students are American citizens, while the other is a legal US resident.

According to a statement released by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), all three students, Hisham Awartani, Kinnan Abdalhamid and Tasheen Aliahmad, are 20 years old and attending nearby colleges. ADC and the police have confirmed that the students were visiting relatives in Burlington, the largest city in Vermont, with a population of roughly 45,000.

While the three were shot at the nearby University of Vermont campus, they are studying at other colleges. Awartani studied at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island; Abdalhamid at Haverford College, near Philadelphia; and Aliahmad at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

Trinity College confirmed in a Sunday statement that Aliahmad is set to graduate from the university in 2026 and is currently in “stable” condition. Haverford President Wendy Raymond and Dean John McKnight confirmed to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that Abdalhamid is a biology major and a member of the track team. They described his injuries as “non life-threatening.” Brown University President Christian H. Paxson confirmed that Awartani is a junior at the college and is still hospitalized.

Paxson said the university will be holding a vigil for Awartani on Monday. “I know that this heinous and despicable act of violence—this latest evidence of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian discrimination spiraling

across this country and around the world—will leave many in our community deeply shaken,” wrote Paxson.

In a Facebook post, Ramallah Friends School, a pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 private Quaker institution in Ramallah, Palestine, confirmed that Awartani, Abdalhamid and Aliahmad were high school graduates. The school said it did not know the severity of all the injuries, but that it appeared Abdalhamid only suffered minor injuries, while Aliahmad was shot in the chest and Awartani in the back.

As of this writing, police have yet to release a motive or the name of the suspect in Saturday’s shooting. In a statement issued Sunday, Burlington Police Chief Jon Murad confirmed that the Palestinian victims were “confronted by a white male with a handgun,” who shot at least four rounds without speaking before fleeing.

The statement noted that two of the victims “were wearing keffiyehs at the time,” and all three students were speaking Arabic. While police have yet to declare a motive, Murad noted that “[i]n this charged moment, no one can look at this incident and not suspect that it may have been a hate-motivated crime. ... And I have already been in touch with federal investigatory and prosecutorial partners to prepare for that if it’s proven.”

In a joint statement issued by the victims’ families through the ADC, the parents of the students said they were “extremely concerned about the safety and well-being of our children” and called on police to treat the shooting “as a hate crime.”

They added, “Our children are dedicated students who deserve to be able to focus on their studies and building

their futures.”

Saturday’s shooting is part of a geyser of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate and bias that has been encouraged by wealthy Zionists, imperialist politicians and virtually every press outlet outside Qatari-backed *Al Jazeera*. Politicians, media talking heads and opinion columnists have slandered protesters against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, many thousands of whom are Jewish, as “antisemitic,” while urging police and university administrators to charge and outlaw expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

From October 7 through November 4, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported that it had received “1,283 requests for help and reports” of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bias, a “216 percent” increase compared to the same time last year.

Reports of bias and requests for help received by CAIR included: “First Amendment issues (23.9 percent), employment (20.56 percent), hate crimes (15.32 percent) and education and bullying (9.2 percent).”

Among the hate crimes, which do not include the shootings in Vermont, is the murder of six-year-old Wadea al-Fayoume in Illinois. Other hate crimes include “two attempted murders, numerous violent threats, the use of vehicles as weapons to target protesters, and incidents involving guns being discharged or brandished to threaten supporters of Palestinian human rights.”

CAIR Research and Advocacy Director Corey Saylor observed, “Both Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism are out of control in ways we have not seen in almost 10 years.

“American Muslims are facing the largest wave of Islamophobic bias that we have documented since then-candidate Donald Trump’s Muslim Ban announcement in December 2015. Political leaders, corporations, media outlets, civic organizations and others all have a role to play in ending this surge in bigotry.”

Saylor added that the “Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian rhetoric that have been used to both justify violence against Palestinians in Gaza and silence supporters of Palestinian human rights here in America has contributed to this unprecedented surge in bigotry.”

A particularly odious example of this bigotry was the exposure of former Obama National Security Council and longtime State Department official Stuart Seldowitz last week. Social media videos, garnering millions of views, showed the ex-government official and then-government lobbyist harassing and threatening Halal food cart workers in New York City.

Late Wednesday night last week, the New York Police Department arrested Seldowitz and confirmed that he had been charged with two counts of stalking in the fourth degree as a hate crime and aggravated harassment in the second degree. All charges are misdemeanors.

Saturday’s shooting in Vermont appears to be the latest anti-Muslim/anti-Arab crime in the United States fueled by the US- and NATO-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. As of this writing, some 15,000 Palestinians have been killed since Israel began combat operations on October 7, including over 6,000 children.

Despite daily protests around the world over the past month-and-a-half, involving tens of millions of people, President Joe Biden and a large majority of Congress have refused to publicly endorse a ceasefire.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, a supposed “progressive” long promoted by the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America, on November 5 publicly opposed calls for a ceasefire in Israel’s murderous military rampage against the population of Gaza. Sanders, who has already endorsed “Genocide Joe” for president in the 2024 election, offered his empty thoughts on Sunday following the shooting.

“Hate has no place here, or anywhere,” Sanders bloviated on X/Twitter. This piece of hypocrisy elicited thousands of angry comments pointing to Sanders’ role in supporting Biden’s presidential campaign and his earlier opposition to a ceasefire.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**