

Defend pro-Palestinian protesters

University of Michigan steps up repression of opponents of US/Israel genocide in Gaza

International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan
26 March 2024

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan condemns the latest moves by the administration to intimidate and silence opposition to the US/Israeli genocide in Gaza.

We unconditionally defend all students, faculty and staff who are targeted by the university's thought police and victimized for the "crime" of protesting against an ongoing war crime that recalls the Nazi Holocaust.

On Sunday night, U-M Vice President for Student Life Martino Harmon sent out a campus-wide email threatening expulsion and criminal prosecution of university members who allegedly engage in "threatening behavior." The email stated:

Violations of law or University policy will result in appropriate consequences, up to and including expulsion. Conduct that may violate criminal law will be referred to federal, state, or local prosecutors.

Vice President Harmon also wrote that the university had increased security patrols "on and around campus," and encouraged pro-Zionist university members to report "threatening behavior." The email included a url link for opponents of campus protests against the mass murder in Gaza to "contact us if they see or experience something that raises concern."

The tissue-thin pretext for this open-ended attack on free speech and political expression was the claim that the previous Friday, a "Michigan student" had posted

an Instagram message that spoke of "'death or worse' for supporters of Israel." No further details were given.

Some social media postings indicate that the student Harmon singled out is a Palestinian student organization leader who apparently made an Instagram post after 14 of her family members had been murdered in Gaza in an Israeli bombing. The Palestinian campus group SAFE issued a statement from this student late Monday night.

With Harmon's email, the university is asserting its "right" and its intention to retaliate against any student, faculty member or employee who violates its "policy" on the limits of free speech—a formula for unlimited censorship and repression.

The email was sent only hours after students and others protesting the Gaza genocide held up signs and chanted slogans during a speech by U-M President Santa Ono at an official university event. It coincides with student government elections being held this week and a referendum organized by the pro-Palestinian Tahrir Coalition calling on the university to divest from corporations doing business with Israel and drop charges against dozens of students who were arrested last fall when the university mobilized campus and local police to break up a peaceful occupation of administration offices.

Last November, the university disallowed a referendum vote authorized by the student government on a resolution calling on the administration to acknowledge the genocidal character of the US/Israeli war on Gaza. After some 10,000 votes had been cast and with the anti-Gaza genocide resolution clearly headed for approval, the university announced it would not recognize the vote or release the referendum results.

It used as the pretext a provocative and false claim made by campus Zionists that leading supporters of the resolution, who were named and maligned, had misused the campus email system. President Ono later admitted these charges were false, but took no action against the Zionists' doxxing of pro-Palestinian students. Instead, Ono declared that the university would not sanction any further votes on Gaza-related resolutions.

The mass opposition on campus to the US/Israeli genocide against the Palestinians is underscored by the fact that thousands have registered to vote in the referendum this week and an Instagram post of Sunday's protest has been "liked" by over 17,000 people in less than 24 hours.

The U-M administration's hostility to the anti-genocide protests is bound up with its deep-rooted connections to American imperialism. A number of its multi-millionaire Board of Regents members are prominent operatives in the Democratic Party.

Even the subject header of Harmon's email—"Civility and speech amid the Israel-Hamas war"—reveals the pro-Zionist attitude of the university. What is taking place in Gaza is not a "war" in any real sense. It is a genocide, which has already taken the lives of over 30,000 Palestinians, overwhelmingly defenseless civilians and mainly women and children. Even the International Court of Justice has called Israel's action "probable genocide."

The U-M escalation of threats against protests is part of a global phenomenon. As with similar attacks on anti-genocide protests at Harvard, Columbia, Brandeis and other US colleges, the university is under pressure from both big business parties and the Biden administration to crush opposition. All of the imperialist and NATO governments are backing Israel and carrying out reprisals against the mass opposition to the genocide on college campuses.

The IYSSE at U-M supports the demands of the referendum for divestment from Israel and the dropping of all charges against anti-Gaza genocide protesters and calls for a "yes" vote. At the same time, we warn against any illusions that passage of the referendum and protests aimed at pressuring the capitalist powers-that-be can shift their policies and end genocide, war, dictatorship and all of the horrors of capitalist barbarism.

The Gaza genocide is one front in an expanding world war spearheaded by US imperialism. The US and NATO are escalating their war against Russia over Ukraine, preparing to deploy Western troops against Russia and making clear they are willing to incite nuclear war.

What is required is the building of a mass, international anti-war movement based on the working class and fighting to bring down the governments and political parties that are carrying out these crimes and establish workers' governments that will put an end to capitalism, the root cause of the crisis, and replace it with socialism. This means a break with the Democrats and the two-party dictatorship of the US financial oligarchy.

The attacks on democratic rights at U-M must be opposed! The IYSSE unconditionally defends all opponents of Zionism and the Gaza genocide against reprisals or threats by the university administration. We call on all students, faculty and university workers to oppose this witch-hunt and uphold democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact