

Oppose UM's anti-democratic attack on opponents of US/Israeli genocide in Gaza!

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

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan (UM) 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 genocide that recalls the Nazi Holocaust.

One million people face death either by bombings or starvation at the hands of the fascist regime in Tel Aviv and its arms suppliers and paymasters in Washington.

They are planning out the impending bloodbath on Rafah, the last refuge of a million Gazan civilians.

None of this evokes the slightest complaint from UM President Santa Ono and the administration. Instead, they have issued a series of increasingly flagrant attacks on those protesting these crimes, with sweeping implications for basic democratic rights.

On Sunday night, 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."

Harmon also wrote that the university had increased security patrols "on and around campus," and encouraged pro-Zionist university members to report "threatening behavior."

Harmon's email was sent only hours after students and others protesting the Gaza genocide held up signs and chanted slogans during a speech by Ono at an official university event. Videos of this protest have circulated widely on social media, with one viewed over 400,000 times.

On Wednesday morning, Ono sent a provocative

campus-wide email denouncing anti-genocide protesters who dared to "disrupt" his speech at Sunday's Honors Convocation. Protests should only be allowed if they do not "disrupt," he proclaimed. In other words, they should be silent and, preferably, invisible.

We should keep our mouths shut while the million-dollar-a-year man, Ono, oversees hundreds of millions of dollars in university investments in companies involved in producing and selling military equipment to carry out the genocide of the Palestinians.

To back up these threats, UM released a draft "disruptive activity policy" on Wednesday evening, which it aims to rubber-stamp into effect starting April 3. The policy is shot through with contradictions, claiming to defend "free speech" as long as such speech does not disrupt "normal celebrations, activities, and operations of the University." Point 2 of the policy is so broad that it could be construed to ban virtually any activity on campus.

The new policy is clearly aimed at intimidating and suppressing all opposition on campus, with explicit threats of "expulsion" for students, "termination" for faculty, and the application of "state trespass law" for visitors who are deemed to have violated the policy.

Accused students would be granted a "hearing" for their charges, at which a university-appointed "hearing officer" will unilaterally determine their fate. If the student disagrees with the decision, another university-appointed "appeal officer" can arrive at the same preordained sentence, with their decision being "final."

The document concludes ominously by declaring this the new law of the land, noting, "In the event of a conflict with another University policy, this Policy shall apply."

With these actions, UM administrators, acting on

behalf of powerful corporate interests and the Democratic Party, are declaring war on the democratic rights of students.

This 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 a 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. 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 UM administration's hostility to the anti-genocide protests is bound up with its deep-rooted connections to American imperialism, which directly implicate it in the genocide in Gaza. A number of its multi-millionaire Board of Regents members are prominent operatives in the Democratic Party. As well, the university has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in firms involved in the manufacture and sale of drones, surveillance technologies and other weapons to the Israel Defense Forces.

The Biden administration and the Democratic Party are just as responsible for the genocide in Gaza as Netanyahu. Indeed, nothing Israel is doing could be accomplished without the financial, military and political support of the White House.

Under conditions in which over 1 million Palestinians face imminent starvation, Democrats and Republicans joined hands last week to block funding for UNRWA, the main UN agency providing aid.

Particular contempt must be reserved for figures like

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, and Bernie Sanders. They mouth criticism of Netanyahu and Israel, but serve as the front-line defenders for the Biden administration and the Democratic Party. Young people outraged by mass slaughter must be "adults," Ocasio-Cortez said, and support the administration that has made it all possible.

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 that they are willing to incite nuclear war.

Global war is inevitably connected to an escalating assault on democratic rights. The UM administration's threats against protests are 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, the student organization of the Socialist Equality Party, is building a mass, international, anti-war movement based on the working class. It is not a question of appealing to the governments of genocide enablers and corporate-financial oligarchs, but of fighting for workers' power, an end to capitalism and the socialist reorganization of world economy.

The attacks on democratic rights at UM 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.



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