

University of California San Francisco medical professor fired for opposing genocide

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On May 20, the University of California fired Dr. Rupa Marya, a longtime professor at its San Francisco medical campus (UCSF), in retaliation for speaking out against the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Dr. Marya has since filed a federal lawsuit challenging her termination as a violation of her First Amendment rights.

In her lawsuit, Dr. Marya exposes the close ties between the University of California, the Democratic Party and the ultra-wealthy Zionist donors who bankroll them both.

Born in California to South Asian parents, Dr. Marya is a highly accomplished internal medicine physician and scholar, with 23 years at UCSF, including 17 years as a clinical professor. Her research, which has been published in *The Lancet* and a *Nature*-branded journal, focuses on understanding the impact of inequalities and power imbalances on health outcomes. Dr. Marya co-authored *Inflamed: Deep Medicine & the Anatomy of Injustice* with writer Raj Patel. She is also an accomplished composer and musician.

Dr. Marya spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about her case. “I was fired for saying, ‘Stop bombing hospitals,’” she explained. “Hospitals are protected under international law.”

She began speaking out against the genocide on her personal social media account in October 2023, as Israel launched its onslaught on the population of Gaza. That same month, Dr. Marya was interrogated by UCSF Executive Vice Chancellor Catherine Lucey about her posts.

Describing the vitriolic reaction of Zionist forces on social media, Dr. Marya explained that after one post went viral, “I received death threats and rape threats.”

She requested that UC defend her against these attacks, as it had in 2020 when she received similar threats for advocating for public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of defending Dr. Marya, however, the UCSF Dean of Medicine informed her in late November that the university was investigating her social media activity for potential violations of UC policy.

As she explains in her lawsuit, “none of her posts targeted criticism at Judaism or Jewish people. Indeed, her posts make clear that her criticisms are directed at the policies, actions, and political ideologies of the Israeli government, and are not grounded in any antipathy toward Jewish people or their religious beliefs.”

On January 4, California State Senator Scott Wiener (Democrat–San Francisco) publicly slandered Dr. Marya as “antisemitic” in response to a thread she had posted two days

earlier on X. He falsely claimed that her remarks—made in a personal capacity and protected by the First Amendment—concerned her employment at UCSF.

On January 6, within two days, UCSF made a public statement on social media accusing Dr. Marya of promoting a “racist” and “antisemitic” “conspiracy theory.” Although the initial post did not name her, UCSF confirmed in an email that it was a response to her posts. Within two hours, Wiener publicly thanked UCSF over social media.

As her lawsuit documents, “Upon information and belief Wiener did so intentionally and maliciously in coordination with others, and as a direct result the website Canary Mission doxxed Dr. Marya, posting her information online, unleashing a flood of defamatory statements, hate mail, and threats against Dr. Marya.”

Dr. Marya’s lawsuit shows that State Senator Wiener, UCSF and the Canary Mission are all funded by the same group of ultra-wealthy oligarchs. These include major real estate developers, who have helped drive the Bay Area’s housing crisis. Their financial influence has contributed to skyrocketing rents and the displacement of working class communities throughout the region.

The lawsuit states:

Canary Mission has received substantial donations from the Helen Diller Family Foundation which is the largest donor to UCSF and the entire University of California. The Foundation president is billionaire Jaclyn Safier, who is also on UCSF’s Board of Overseers. Safier is also the Chief Executive Officer of the Prometheus Real Estate Group, which has donated substantially to the California Apartment Association (CAA) to block rent control in California. The CAA has financially supported Senator Scott Wiener to advance their agendas.

While repeatedly ignoring Dr. Marya’s requests for defense against ongoing threats to her life and health, UCSF instead launched an investigation into her social media activity, for alleged violations of the faculty code of conduct. As early as April 2024 without prior notice, UC sent a plainclothes police officer for “security” as she spoke at a conference.

In August and September of 2024, Dr. Marya told the WSWS:

“I was told by a group of my medical students that they had heard there was a student from Israel and that they were concerned that they may have served in the IDF and participated in the genocide. I didn’t try to find out who that student was because I would be accused of stalking. But I did want to address my students’ concerns. I feel that our profession is obligated to ask the question of whether it is ethical to train doctors who come from a country with mandatory military service that is actively committing genocide.” She also posted a general question along these lines on social media.

She further explains in her lawsuit that “By that time some UCSF faculty, students and staff had lost upwards of 60 family members in the genocide in Gaza.”

In response to this entirely justified effort to address student concerns and promote necessary discussions of medical ethics, Dr. Marya was slandered by state Senator Wiener as harassing a first-year Israeli medical student. Citing the same social media post, UCSF placed her on leave on September 22, 2024. The decision to place her on leave was illegally leaked to the press and published in the Democratic Party-aligned *San Francisco Chronicle* the next day.

Notably, it appears that the student Senator Wiener is supposedly defending may not even exist. “UC sent a 462-page report when they tried to fire me. There were dozens of redacted black pages, so I don’t even know all the arguments they are making against me. The report says that there is no first-year Israeli medical student. I may have been fired based on someone who doesn’t exist.”

UCSF then went after her clinical privileges, including through efforts to solicit incident reports claiming that Dr. Marya, who has no patient safety reports after 23 years of service, posed a danger to patient safety.

These efforts culminated in UCSF’s decision to unilaterally terminate Dr. Marya without due process. “I was fired without a hearing,” she told the WSWS. “I am a clinical professor, so I did not have tenure, but I was entitled to a hearing before the academic senate. I was told I could choose between a grievance letter or a hearing in academic senate. I chose a hearing, and I was fired.”

Dr. Marya highlighted the silence of her peers under intense pressure from UC, the Democrats and the Trump administration. “There has not been a peep from the academic senate. This is a serious warning.

“It isn’t just me,” she continued. “Other professors are being fired without due process.”

Dr. Marya’s case highlights the bipartisan character of the ongoing attack against anti-genocide freedom of speech. The targeting of a pre-eminent California-born doctor and professor for engaging in constitutionally protected anti-genocide speech illustrates that it is not only immigrants and students whose rights are being systematically dismantled by Democrats and Republicans alike.

UC’s firing of Dr. Marya is of a piece with the multi-billion-dollar university system’s brutal repression of student protests in 2023 and 2024 under the Biden administration.

The case of UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) student organizer Laaila Irshad highlights the lengths to which UC will go to suppress anti-

genocide sentiment. Within 15 days of filing a civil rights lawsuit against UC for its violent dispersal of the UCSC anti-genocide encampment, UCPD (University of California Police Department) seized undergraduate student Irshad’s phone during a fire drill in the middle of the night in front of hundreds of fellow students. The nominal reason for the seizure was a sealed warrant for alleged vandalism that had supposedly occurred months prior.

UC Board of Regents, primarily composed of Democratic Party appointees, vociferously defended this authoritarian warrant, which included all data on her phone, including privileged communications with her attorneys. UC attorneys from top California Democratic Party law firm Munger went so far as to cite cases of child pornography as precedents for unrestricted full-device searches.

Through a determined struggle in court, Irshad, her legal team and her supporters were able to win a partial victory, with the judge who issued the initial warrant dramatically reducing its temporal scope and excluding communications with attorneys. However, as of this writing, Irshad’s phone still has not been returned, highlighting that the defense of democratic rights cannot be left to the courts.

Dr. Marya highlighted the disastrous role the ultra-wealthy play in shaping all aspects of social life, “The billionaires have taken our health, or housing, or water, our food. People like [Stewart] Resnick [who owns much of the water rights in California] are taking that money and sending it to Israel to kick people off their land and give it to settlers.

“The University of California is serving the billionaires, not the people of California. We the people need to come together to make a change, so that we take care of the people, instead of the 1 percent.”

Workers, students and faculty at UC and beyond must take up the defense of Dr. Marya and all workers, students and professionals victimized for opposing the genocide in Gaza. This is particularly true for the over 1,300 healthcare workers at UCSF’s Benioff Children’s Hospital in Oakland, California, who are set to strike on June 18 over proposed budget cuts and attacks on job protections. By courageously speaking out against genocide, Dr. Marya is fighting in the best traditions of the medical profession, setting an example that must be followed.

Asked how we should fight in defense of victimized faculty, students and staff at universities, Dr. Marya responded, “I think we need a general strike.”



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