

Law professors denounce UCLA chancellor, who attacked 9/11 symposium for promoting “terrorism” and “antisemitism”

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More than 60 UCLA law professors, joined by almost 300 others from law schools throughout the United States—the numbers are growing—have published open letters denouncing Chancellor Julio Frenk’s public statement critical of the School of Law’s symposium on “25 Years after 9/11: Reimagining Freedom, Justice and Security.”

The symposium opened on the 25th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks with an emotional remembrance for the almost 3,000 people who died in New York City, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania. Six panels comprised of law professors and attorneys discussed “Transformations in International Law”; “Torture, Rendition and Detention”; “Borders, Migration and National Security”; “The Racialization of the War on Terror” and “Security, Surveillance and the Quest for Total Information.”

The large meeting room filled to capacity. The panel discussions were conducted at a high intellectual level and without incident. Speakers elaborated on the myriad changes in US and international law over the last 25 years tied to the 9/11 attacks and ensuing “War on Terror.” The program was certified by the California State Bar for legal education credits.

Without consulting with the symposium organizers, Chancellor Frenk issued a provocative public statement directed to 90-year-old Judea Pearl, a UCLA computer science professor. Frenk wrote that the symposium promoted “antisemitism, terrorism and hatred” and apologized to Pearl because it caused “pain” to “members of our community.”

Pearl is the father of Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped by reactionary al Qaeda-aligned forces in Pakistan on January 23, 2002, while reporting for the *Wall Street Journal*. Despite widespread international calls for Pearl’s release, including by the *World Socialist Web Site*, Pearl was savagely murdered, as recorded on a grisly video delivered to the US Consulate in Karachi on February 21, 2002.

Professor Pearl had posted on X that the symposium was “weaponizing the painful days of 9/11 and 10/7 to promote hateful ideologies.”

“Having lost a son to such an ideology,” Pearl wrote, “I stand ashamed of my university [for] sponsoring this despicable symposium.”

Pearl identified no evidence in support of his vile, false claim that the symposium “weaponized” 9/11. Instead, he cited an article in the *Washington Free Beacon*, an ultra-right website funded by billionaire vulture capitalist and major Republican donor Paul Singer, published before the symposium took place. The *Free Beacon* specializes in hit jobs targeting selected academics, generally by blowing out of

proportion relatively minor matters, such as research errors or hyperbolic statements, and pounding on them without necessary context.

The slanderous *Free Beacon* article, “UCLA To Host 9/11 Symposium Featuring Terror Apologists,” condemned the appearance on a panel by a highly regarded Southern California civil rights attorney, who is one of six military lawyers representing Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, an alleged 9/11 “mastermind” facing 3,000 counts of murder. The lawyer, who is also an adjunct professor at the UC Irvine School of Law, was contracted by the US Defense Department’s “Military Commissions Defense Organization,” which provides the independent lawyers who represent Guantánamo accused.

Referred to as “KSM” in military and CIA documents, Mohammed was captured in Pakistan on March 1, 2003, based on intelligence that he was the first to propose flying hijacked airplanes into buildings and coordinated the plot with Osama bin Laden. As the US government concedes, Mohammed was incarcerated without access to counsel for several years in secret CIA “black sites,” where he was tortured repeatedly, included 183 waterboarding sessions.

After years of procedural maneuvering, including an abortive proposal to hold a trial in a New York City civilian court and a revoked plea bargain that would have resulted in life imprisonment, Mohammed’s case is set for trial before a military commission on June 5, 2028.

The reliability and admissibility of various statements obtained through torture from Mohammed and others during the “War on Terror” is a recurrent legal issue in the military courts. There have been multiple exclusion orders, including Mohammed’s supposed confession before his arrival at Guantánamo that he killed Daniel Pearl personally. The Pearl family issued a statement that “It is impossible to know at this point whether Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s boast about killing our son has any bearing in truth.”

The Murdoch tabloid *New York Post* republished the *Free Beacon* story, which was otherwise ignored in mainstream media outlets until Chancellor Frenk’s statement, which was reported on the *Los Angeles Times* website as an unprecedented “rebuke” of the law school event.

UCLA law professors Ahilan Arulanantham and LaToya Baldwin Clark, who organized the symposium, responded, “We showcased a nuanced and sophisticated set of conversations among more than twenty leading experts who discussed both the successes and the failures of our government and our nation in the years since 9/11.”

On September 18, more than 60 UCLA law professors published an open letter stating that Frenk’s public statement “closely followed and

seemed to echo criticism, including in the tabloid press and on social media, that the Symposium supported terrorism and antisemitism” because it “hosted critics of the government’s response to 9/11” and “included, as a panelist, a government-appointed attorney who represented Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.”

“This media disinformation campaign,” the letter explained, was “launched against UCLA Law academic programs (and by implication UCLA) before the Symposium occurred and without regard to what was actually said,” adding that “the Chancellor’s rebuke ... exposed the faculty and staff affiliated with planning the Symposium, as well as the invited speakers, to harassment and threats.”

The letter continued:

The statement strongly suggested the Symposium was somehow supportive of terrorism and antisemitism. ... No speaker made any statement remotely suggesting support for any such positions. Some speakers did criticize some government counterterrorism efforts, such as the so-called Muslim Travel Ban, as racist practices that assigned guilt based on group membership, with no law enforcement value. These views are widely held among lawyers. While one may disagree, the notion that such arguments are antisemitic or support terrorism—without even hearing any speaker who made them—is absurd.

The Chancellor’s statement also implicitly accepted the critique that the Symposium supported terrorism because it included as a panelist a government lawyer employed by the Trump Administration’s Department of Defense who was assigned to defend Mohammed....

The criticism leveled at the Symposium for including the lawyer reflected a profound misunderstanding of the lawyer’s role. We teach our students that our constitution guarantees to every criminal defendant charged with serious offenses the assistance of counsel. ... To impute the crimes of the client to the lawyer is to undermine this constitutional imperative

A second letter, signed by nearly 300 law professors from other institutions, likewise defended the right to counsel and condemned Frenk’s attack on the symposium.

Frenk’s intervention cannot be separated from his own role in the repression of opposition to the Gaza genocide at UCLA. He was selected by the University of California Board of Regents in June 2024, amid the violent crackdown on anti-genocide encampments. His appointment was intended to continue and escalate the policies of outgoing Chancellor Gene Block, who had declared the encampments “unlawful” and expelled protesting students from campus, cutting them off from their dormitories and meal services.

Frenk was unanimously selected by a Board of Regents dominated by ultra-wealthy corporate interests and political appointees. The regents approved a starting salary of \$978,904, in addition to university-provided housing. The *World Socialist Web Site* described him at the time as a “pro-Zionist corporate shill” chosen to intensify the attack on students and workers.

Within weeks of taking office, Frenk demonstrated the purpose of his appointment. In February 2025, he announced the suspension of Students for Justice in Palestine and Graduate Students for Justice in Palestine following a protest outside the home of UC Regent Jonathan

“Jay” Sures. Sures is a trustee of the Los Angeles Police Foundation and has served on the boards overseeing two laboratories involved in the development and testing of US nuclear weapons.

Frenk’s campus-wide email depicted the protest as an outbreak of antisemitic violence and declared, “There is no place for violence in our Bruin community.” The suspension barred both organizations from reserving meeting rooms, receiving student funding or formally associating themselves with UCLA.

His invocation of “violence” stood in stark contrast to the administration’s response to the April 30, 2024 attack, when a pro-Zionist mob assaulted the anti-genocide encampment for hours while police stood by. The following night, UCLA brought police onto the campus to destroy the encampment, injuring dozens and arresting more than 200 protesters. Virtually none of the attackers faced prosecution.

The repression continues. Doctoral student Dylan Kupsh filed suit against UCLA in August, alleging that the university subjected him to nearly two years of retaliatory disciplinary proceedings because of his participation in anti-genocide protests. Kupsh was barred from most campus activities for 291 days, suspended for two academic quarters and denied his completed master’s degree for more than 600 days. Of 14 university charges brought against him, 12 were dismissed. He was found responsible only for failing to show his student identification on demand and allegedly obstructing another student on a sidewalk.

This record exposes the fraudulent character of Frenk’s supposed concern for protecting the university community. He has repeatedly employed allegations of violence, terrorism and antisemitism to legitimize attacks on political opposition, while actual violence against students protesting the Gaza genocide has gone largely unpunished.

Frenk should know better than to side with the fascists. A fourth-generation physician, his direct ancestors fled Nazi Germany for Mexico in the 1930s.



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