

New York hospital fires Palestinian-American nurse for referring to Gaza genocide while accepting award for outstanding care

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NYU Langone Health in New York recently fired Hesen Jabr, a labor and delivery nurse, for publicly calling Israel's ongoing mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza a genocide. Jabr, a Palestinian-American, made her remarks while accepting an award for the outstanding care that she has provided. Her abrupt termination is the latest attack not only on the right to free speech, but also on mass opposition to the genocide among healthcare workers and the working class more broadly.

Jabr had worked at NYU Langone since 2015. Earlier in May, she received an award reserved for, in the hospital's words, "a nurse who exemplifies what it means to provide compassionate care to patients and their families during perinatal bereavement." In the speech that she gave to accept the award, Jabr connected her work in the United States with the grief experienced by thousands of mothers in Gaza whose children have been killed.

"It pains me to see the women from my country going through unimaginable losses themselves during the current genocide in Gaza," said Jabr, according to footage that she posted on Instagram. "This award is deeply personal to me for those reasons. Even though I can't hold their hands and comfort them as they grieve their unborn children and the children they have lost during this genocide, I hope to keep making them proud as I keep representing them here at NYU." The workers in attendance applauded Jabr's speech.

Jabr's use of the term "genocide" is entirely justified. During the week of Jabr's speech, the International Court of Justice invoked the 1948 Genocide Convention and issued an emergency order for Israel to "immediately halt its military offensive" and cease

actions that "inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." This ruling arose during proceedings against Israel under the Genocide Convention that South Africa initiated in December 2023.

As of May 30, Israel had killed 36,224 people and wounded 81,777 others since October 7, according to the Gaza health ministry. These figures are likely to be underestimates. Moreover, about 80 percent of Gazans (a population of 2.3 million) have been displaced by the onslaught. Parts of the territory are experiencing famine, according to United Nations officials.

After the award ceremony, Jabr returned to work on May 22. "As soon as I walked into the unit, I was dragged into an impromptu meeting with the president and vice president of nursing at NYU Langone to discuss how I 'put others at risk' and 'ruined the ceremony' and 'offended people' because a small part of my speech was a tribute towards the grieving mothers in my country," she wrote on Instagram. "I was sent back to work my shift while the hospital spent the day 'figuring out' what to do with me. After working almost the entire shift, I was dragged once again to an office where I was read my termination letter by the director of human resources, Austin Bender, and escorted off the premises by a plainclothes police officer."

As of this writing, Jabr's Instagram post has received nearly 2,400 likes. Mothers who lost their babies and healthcare workers who have faced similar retaliation for voicing support for the Palestinians commented on the post with words of appreciation and encouragement.

In a threadbare attempt to justify the firing, Steve

Ritea, a spokesperson for NYU Langone, told the *New York Times* that Jabr had been involved in “a previous incident as well.” He did not describe the alleged incident, much less attempt to reconcile this with the hospital’s decision to give her an award for “oustanding service.” In reality, this “incident” was an earlier use by Jabr of her First Amendment right to free speech. She had been warned in December “not to bring her views on this divisive and charged issue into the workplace.”

In practice, this means that NYU Langone, which bears the name of billionaire and Republican Party donor Kenneth Langone, will only tolerate expressions of support for the Zionist state.

Jabr is not the first worker that NYU Langone has fired for supporting Palestinians and opposing Israel’s genocide. Last fall, the administration removed Dr. Zaki Masoud from service at a Long Island, New York, hospital after he posted a comment in support of “Palestinian resistance” on Instagram. More than 100,000 people signed a petition to protest the termination, and Masoud was quietly reinstated.

Jabr’s courageous statement reflects growing international opposition to the genocide. Protests and rallies have been held at colleges and universities throughout the United States. Earlier this month, about 250,000 people in London marched against the genocide. Large protests also occurred at the Eurovision song contest in Malmo, Sweden.

The ruling class is openly defying this mass opposition. White House National Security spokesman John Kirby brazenly stated that President Joe Biden “does not make decisions or execute policy based on public opinion polling.” These scornful words are being coupled with violent police repression. In the past two months, almost 3,000 Americans have been arrested for demonstrating against the genocide.

The most significant response to this police repression has been the strike of academic workers at the University of California (UC) system. About 48,000 workers at the system, who are members of the United Auto Workers (UAW), voted to strike against the police crackdown on anti-genocide protesters. This action marks the initiation of an explicitly political struggle by a section of the working class.

The UAW, however, opposes this strike and is sparing no effort to sabotage it. It held the strike vote

only due to intense pressure from the workers. First, the UAW leadership delayed the strike, then it limited it to UC Santa Cruz. Workers’ anger forced the UAW to expand the strike to UC Los Angeles and UC Davis. Nevertheless, the union leadership is negotiating an agreement with the UC administration that will end the strike without stopping the genocide or addressing workers’ demands. In fact, the UAW has already abandoned the workers’ call for the removal of police from the campuses.

The UAW leadership, like the bureaucrats at the heads of the other trade unions, are enforcing the demands of the Democratic Party, which is united with the Republicans in support of the genocide. Both capitalist parties falsely label the protests as anti-Semitic, and both favor the suppression of the protests with batons and tear gas.

As important as the student protests have been, the working class, including healthcare workers like Jabr, must emerge as the leading force in the fight against the genocide and in defense of democratic rights. Workers can only wage this fight by establishing their independence from both warmongering capitalist parties and the trade unions that serve them. The first step will be for workers to form rank-and-file committees at every workplace. The fight to end the genocide is a political struggle that ultimately must aim to overthrow the capitalist system, which is the root cause of war and exploitation.



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