

Jewish students, faculty, staff at University of Michigan denounce “weaponization of antisemitism”

Matthew Brennan, Barry Grey
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Over 400 Jewish students, faculty and staff at the University of Michigan (U-M) have signed open letters denouncing the administration’s “weaponization of antisemitism.” The letters demand that the university end its collaboration with the Trump administration in the crackdown on political speech and the campaign of abductions, disappearances and deportations of non-citizen students and faculty for lawfully expressing opposition to the US-backed Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

These include Momodou Taal, a Cornell Ph.D. candidate who was forced to leave the country after federal agents sought to detain him for challenging Trump’s unconstitutional executive orders seeking to abolish free speech; Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia graduate student and lawful permanent resident who remains in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody; and Tufts University Fulbright scholar Rumeysa Ozturk, who was kidnapped in broad daylight by masked federal agents and is currently imprisoned.

The letters also demand an end to the university’s attack on free speech on campus in the form of police attacks, arrests and prosecutions of students and others involved in peaceful protests. This began under the Democratic Biden administration and has been intensified under Trump.

Universities across the country, including U-M, are capitulating to demands from the fascist Trump administration that academic programs and faculty targeted by Zionist groups and the US government be silenced for speaking the truth about the decades-long occupation and dispossession of the Palestinian people by the Zionist state, which serves as the main outpost of US imperialism in the Middle East.

Last month, Columbia University agreed to a list of demands for an intensified crackdown in return for the reversal of Trump’s announced withholding of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal grants. This included the adoption of a new definition of antisemitism that conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

This was followed by U-M President Santa Ono’s announcement that he was shutting down the university’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs in order to

comply with Trump’s demands to impose his “America First” ideology and whitewash of US history as a condition for retaining billions in federal funding. Ono and the U-M regents have brought police onto the campus to attack and arrest peaceful pro-Palestinian protesters and charge them with felonies.

Zionist students at U-M have been persistently filing civil rights violation accusations with the Trump Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) against pro-Palestinian protestors, according to a March 12 Michigan Public Radio report. Over 60 universities, including U-M, have been named for investigation by the OCR, with warnings of “potential enforcement actions if they do not fulfill their obligations” to “protect Jewish students on campus.”

It has since been reported that Trump is preparing to “pause” funding to Brown University, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania, and has ordered Harvard to accept his dictates or lose billions in federal funding.

The U-M open letters are an unanswerable refutation of the lie—relentlessly promoted by both political parties, the media and the academic establishment—that opposition to the ongoing mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians is driven by antisemitism. The broad endorsement of the letters underscores the fact that many of those protesting crimes against humanity and war crimes in Gaza and the West Bank that recall the Nazi Holocaust are themselves of Jewish descent.

The letter from Jewish students to U-M President Ono was published on March 21, bearing 119 signatures. It states, in part:

We take antisemitism seriously, and for this reason, we are appalled by its dangerous weaponization to target Palestinian, Muslim, Arab, and immigrant students, threaten student activists, and gut institutions of higher education. **We are united in denouncing the weaponization of antisemitism accusations to target our classmates, friends, teachers, and neighbors.** (Emphasis in the letter)... The Trump administration is

cynically making Jews the face of authoritarian repression and diluting antisemitism's meaning through politically motivated accusations... Above all, they destabilize the lives of those who fear they will be the next victims of the Trump administration's unlawful attacks on non-citizens, dissent, and civil liberties.

The letter points out that the Trump administration has welcomed "Nazi sympathizers into the highest positions of power." It specifically calls on the university to "denounce the targeting of Mahmoud Khalil and to cease voluntary collaboration with federal immigration enforcement."

The letter puts forward six demands. The first three focus on Trump's sweeping attacks on constitutional rights, including demands that the administration defend student protestors and immigrants:

- Cease any voluntary collaboration with immigration authorities, and do not supply them with names or other personal information. Inform students individually if ICE or other federal agencies are seeking their personal information and provide them with legal counsel.

- Commit university resources to protect and provide legal assistance to community members targeted by the Trump administration, and do not allow attacks on immigrant and activist students to jeopardize their university standing, support, access, or employment.

- Defend every university member's—regardless of citizenship status—constitutional right to free speech as protected by the First Amendment, without fear of internal, external, or governmental retaliation.

Two demands call for broad collaboration across universities to oppose the illegal reign of terror and uphold democratic processes. A sixth demand rejects the attempt to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism, stating:

Do not equate constitutionally protected political speech, including criticisms of Israel and its government, with religious or racial discrimination. Reject the harmful narrative that the Palestinian solidarity movement, in which many Jews on this campus have participated, is presumptively anti-Jewish.

The letter by Jewish faculty and staff, published March 26, has thus far gathered 297 signatures. Addressed to Ono, it states:

We are writing to you united in extreme concern as we witness the exploitation of antisemitism that, although reflective of a real problem, is increasingly

being deployed in an effort to harass, expel, arrest, deport, dox, and defame students, faculty, staff, and other academic workers across the country as part of a broader assault on higher education.

Both letters have been issued in solidarity with a statement titled "Not in Our Name" that was issued on March 11 by Concerned Jewish Faculty & Staff—Boston Area and has gathered 3,191 signatures. The Boston letter also defends Mahmoud Khalil and exposes the sinister nature of Trump's invocation of antisemitism, stating:

This marks a disturbing escalation in the Trump administration's open assault on our democracy. President Trump then exploited the Hebrew language to taunt Khalil and continues to use Jews as a shield to justify a naked attack on political dissent and university independence. All against the backdrop of Trump pardoning white supremacists and platforming neo-Nazis.

The Boston letter takes aim at specific Zionist organizations, insisting that all universities "terminate all collaboration with organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League, that smear our students and now applaud the lawless targeting of political opponents."

Other forms of campus opposition have since emerged in response to the university attacks, including several members of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) chaining themselves to the entrance gates of Columbia University, demanding that the names of the trustees involved in the kidnapping of Mahmoud Khalil be made known to the public.



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