

אקדמיה לשוויון

أكاديميون من أجل المساواة

July 10th, 2017

President Joseph Castro
California State University, Fresno

CC: Chancellor Timothy White, Provost Lynnette Zelezny, Dean Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, AVP Rudy Sanchez

Dear President Castro:

We write as an organization of over three hundred academics committed to a just peace with the Palestinian people and to social justice within Israeli society. We have been following the abrupt cancellation of the search for the Edward Said Professorship at CSU-Fresno. First, let us state that we support wholeheartedly the idea behind an appointment in honor of Edward Said, since an important part of his legacy was to open space for Palestinian narratives, which are all-too-often silenced in the US, Israel, and allied countries.

However, we were disappointed in your decision to cancel the current search. Although, according to media reports, you deny that external pressure caused the cancellation of the search, the reasoning has left serious doubts. We therefore join with the hundreds of academics who [signed a petition asking you to re-instate the search and the current short-list](#).

As progressive scholars, citizens of Israel, we have a special interest in this case. The academic freedom of Palestinian scholars and students is denied on a daily basis, especially under the harsh conditions of the State of Israel's brutal military rule. Violations of Palestinian rights, and attempts to report these flagrant violations, are ignored or actively silenced.

We read of similar silencing in Professor Vida Samiian's public letter, with respect to lectures that were arranged at CSU-Fresno in the past. Prof. Samiian also mentions a documented campaign of targeting members of the search committee, as well as highly inappropriate emails from colleagues regarding this particular search. Notably, Prof. Samiian's statements about this targeting have *not been denied* by you or your representatives.¹ Further, we have not heard of any measures taken against such cases of harassment, which will produce a chilling effect on the campus, on faculty deliberation, and on academic freedom.

As a result of these reports, including statements from your own administration, we concur with the letter of the Middle East Studies Association, sent to you on June 2nd, [which raises many legitimate concerns about the cancellation of the search](#). In particular, the MESA letter cites Professor Joe Parks, who was the Equal Employment Opportunities representative on the search committee, and who explains that the composition and workings of the committee were well-known to the administration for almost a year. [Prof. Parks' conclusion is that the cancellation was a "discriminatory act."](#) That is a devastating conclusion.

We know that CSU-Fresno prides itself on its commitment to transparency and accessibility to students of all backgrounds. We believe that this cancelled search is a grave setback to that commitment. We urge you to reconsider and re-instate the search.

Sincerely,

Academia for Equality Israel

¹ For example, in the following articles, where administration officials were quoted at length: <https://www.jweekly.com/2017/06/08/jewish-leaders-deny-pro-israel-pressure-led-fresno-state-to-cancel-faculty-hire/>, <http://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/education/article154731264.html>, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/05/31/why-did-fresno-state-cancel-search-professorship-named-after-late-edward-said>.