

From: Yaqub, Nadia <yaqub@email.unc.edu>

Sent: Saturday, October 14, 2023 1:31 PM

To: Guskiewicz, Kevin M <gus@email.unc.edu>; Clemens, J. Christopher <clemens@physics.unc.edu>; White, James William Carl <jwcwhite@unc.edu>; Cox, Leah <Leah.Cox@unc.edu>; Slocum, Karla <kslocum@unc.edu>; McDonald, Noreen <noreen@unc.edu>; Yaghoobi, Claudia <yaghoobi@email.unc.edu>; Pitelka, Morgan <mpitelka@unc.edu>

Cc: Aydin, Cemil <caydin@email.unc.edu>; Hammer, Juliane <jhammer@email.unc.edu>; Elyse Crystall <ecryst@mindspring.com>; Gokariksel, Pervin Banu <banug@email.unc.edu>; Stroman, Deborah L <dstro@unc.edu> Subject: Letter to Kevin regarding latest statement on events in Israel-Palestine

Dear Kevin,

As one of very few faculty on campus who teach on the Arab world and even fewer with any expertise on Palestine and the Palestinians, I have been extraordinarily busy addressing the events of the past week. I have also been emotionally distraught. I do not have much time to devote to this email, so please forgive me if my thoughts are not well-formulated. However, I cannot let the email you sent yesterday to the campus community pass without comment.

I am disappointed and discouraged by what you wrote, especially since I warned you against this type of statement last week. From the many conversations I have had recently, I can tell you that it will only confirm feelings that already exist among students and other members of the campus community that the needs and perspectives of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims are not of any real concern to your administration.

Let me briefly explain: Your email was sent after Israel conducted bombing raids on Gaza that so far have killed more than 2000, including 600 children, wounded several thousand others, and displaced 400,000 people from their homes. If followed the imposition by Israel of complete blockade of all water, electricity, food, fuel, and medical supplies to more than two million people, a full half of whom are children. Your email was sent after Israel demanded that 1 million Gazan civilians somehow find a way to evacuate their homes within 24 hours and move to the southern half of the Gaza Strip where there is no shelter, supplies, or infrastructure to serve them. Before you sent your email, Gazans who actually heeded Israel's unreasonable demand that they leave their homes were bombed and killed on one of only two roads available to them to evacuate. Since last weekend's events and before you sent your email, more than fifty Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military and armed Israeli settlers in the West Bank. All of this information is readily available in The New York Times, as are the urgent statements from various international relief organizations and legal experts who are intimately familiar with conditions in the Gaza Strip who tell us that what is happening amounts to war crimes. Moreover, everyone who follows events in the region knew at the time you sent your message, that for Gazan's the worst is yet to come, and so far, today's developments have proved that to be true. To send out a statement yesterday afternoon that makes no mention of any of these horrific developments in unconscionable.

The one act of violence you do mention is the attack by Hamas on Israel. I think we can all agree that that attack was horrifically violent and that Israeli civilians, like Palestinian civilians, should not have to face this type of violence. I, like you, mourn those lives, and empathize with those who are in pain because of that violence. However, you describe Hamas's attack as unprovoked and that is not true. Hamas was provoked by 16 years of sanctions on the Gaza Strip by the international community, repeated violations

of ceasefire agreements by Israel, the unconscionable escalation in violence in the West Bank over the past several months, the increasingly provocative violations of decades old, internationally recognized protocols regarding religious worship at the Aqsa Mosque compound, and the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Again, well-respected human rights organizations and international experts have written with concern about all of these matters and Hamas repeatedly cited these actions by Israel as provocations before they attacked. Does all this violence perpetrated by Israel against Palestinians with impunity mean that Israeli civilians deserve to face death and displacement? Of course not. However, they do constitute provocations. To say otherwise implies that the death, suffering, and dispossession, much of it illegal according to international law, of millions of people is acceptable simply because they are Palestinian. Even worse, you miseducate the campus community by suggesting that the only victims of violence are Israelis. It also must be emphasized that horrific though the violence that Hamas unleashed may have been, it is not more horrific than the violence that Israel has unleashed against Palestinians.

There are members of your campus community with friends and family in the Gaza Strip. How do you think it makes them feel to read your outrage at the recent attacks on Israelis and make no mention of the violence that their loved ones are facing as you wrote this communication and no acknowledgment of the decades of violence perpetrated by Israel against them, much of it repeatedly condemned by the international community, that have led up to this week's events? The disregard for Palestinian life, and, frankly, the racism, intentional or otherwise, implicit in this omission makes me feel sick.

In your letter, you offer resources to Jewish and Muslim students, but do not mention Palestinian or Arab students. The Arab world, including the Palestinian community, includes millions of Christians as well as people who do not practice a faith. They are just as affected by recent events as Muslims and Jews. Frankly, it is bizarre to offer services to people only in religious terms. It indirectly perpetrates the myth that what is happening in Israel-Palestine is a religious conflict (it is not) and is alienating to people who do not practice a religion. Moreover, your offer of services for Muslim students sounds insincere because you fail to explicitly acknowledge that they, too, face violence that deserves to be named as specifically as the violence inflicted on Israelis.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to refrain from sending out any more emails about what is happening in Israel/Palestine without first consulting your experts on campus. An excellent way to start would be to reach out to Claudia Yaghoobi, the director of your Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. She can then consult with a range of faculty and help you construct emails that are truly empathetic to your entire campus community. I regard your most recent letter as a terrible misstep that will only alienate further some of the most vulnerable members of our community. This simply should not happen again.

Sincerely, Nadia Yaqub

Nadia Yaqub  
Professor

Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, CB 3267 University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3267  
Tel: 919 843-8149  
Email: ragub@email.unc.edu

