



February 15, 2019

VIA EMAIL

Barbara K. Rimer, DrPH, MPH
Dean and Alumni Distinguished Professor
Gillings School of Global Public Health
Dean's Office
170 Rosenau Hall, CB #7400
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

Dear Dean Rimer:

We are appalled by the choice of anti-Semitic bigot Linda Sarsour as the keynote speaker at the Minority Health Conference, which is taking place on February 22, 2019, at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (the “University”).

You and the Gillings School of Global Public Health (the “School”) have denied responsibility for choosing Ms. Sarsour and put the onus entirely on the students who are planning and executing this conference. But the School and the University bear responsibility as well. The School is a co-sponsor of the conference, and the University is providing a venue and – we presume – financial and other support. The University and the School therefore have the right and the moral obligation to (1) speak out and condemn the student organizers’ poor choice of a keynote speaker; and (2) urge that the invitation to Ms. Sarsour be rescinded and that this honor be conferred on someone else who is truly worthy.

Please consider these facts about Linda Sarsour:

- Ms. Sarsour has aligned herself and extolled a terrorist who murdered innocent Jews in Israel. When she shared a podium with Rasmia Odeh – who had been convicted of murdering two college students in a 1969 supermarket bombing in Israel and who was deported for concealing her terrorist crimes on her U.S. immigration forms – Sarsour [said](#) she was “honored and privileged to be here in this space, and honored to be on this stage with Rasmia.”
- Ms. Sarsour promotes violence against Jews and terror wars against Israel. She posted a photo of a young Arab child walking toward Israeli soldiers, holding rocks in both hands, and [praised](#) it as “the definition of courage.” When there was justifiable backlash from New York City Council Member Rory Lancman and others, Ms. Sarsour [tweeted](#), “The Zionist trolls are out to play. Bring it.” Ms. Sarsour also [tweeted](#) her support for the

intifada – the term for the Palestinian Arab terror war against Jews in Israel – describing it as “invaluable on many fronts.”

- Ms. Sarsour [opposes](#) the right of the Jewish State of Israel to exist, expressing her unbridled hatred on Twitter with statements such as “[Nothing is creepier than Zionism](#)” and “[Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] [Netanyahu is a waste of a human being.](#)”
- Ms. Sarsour openly [supports](#) the anti-Semitic Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, whose aim is to harm and destroy the Jewish state.
- Ms. Sarsour ostracizes and excludes Jews and other Israel supporters from the fight for women’s rights and equality, [promoting](#) the false and bigoted notion that if you are a Zionist, then you cannot be a feminist. There is absolutely no conflict between Zionism and feminism.
- Ms. Sarsour has condemned and delegitimized brave, true feminists who speak out against radical Islam. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, once a devout Muslim, has courageously criticized the role that Islam plays in tolerating the abuse of women, such as genital mutilation and so-called honor killings. She knows about these abuses first-hand, and has faced death threats for her advocacy on behalf of girls and women. Instead of showing her respect, Ms. Sarsour disgustingly [tweeted](#) that Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s “vagina should be taken away” and that she does not “deserve” to be a woman.
- Ms. Sarsour claims to care about bigotry – except when it is directed against Jews, [stating](#) that anti-Semitism “can’t exactly compare to . . . anti-black racism or Islamophobia.” She also showed shocking insensitivity and ignorance about the suffering of black slaves in the U.S. when she [tweeted](#), “The sacrifice [that] the black Muslim slaves went through in this country is nothing compared to Islamaphobia [sic] today.”

As you know, North Carolina Hillel has [made it crystal clear](#) that Ms. Sarsour’s presence at the conference is having an adverse impact on Jewish students. They may not attend the conference because of a well-founded fear that they will be made to feel unwelcome and forced to choose between their commitment to the health of minorities and their support for Israel. One student [said](#), “As a Jewish student, I would be hesitant to attend any conference in which the keynote speaker has used platforms unrelated to Israel to denounce the Jewish state.”

A Chapel Hill resident [was blunter](#): “Linda Sarsour is a master manipulator. She uses the suffering of disadvantaged communities to foment hate against Israel and with it the Jewish people – that is her true agenda.”

We agree. If you and the School truly lack the authority to rescind the invitation to Linda Sarsour to be the keynote speaker, then we urge you to take at least the following two steps:

1. Exercise your own First Amendment rights and issue a public statement condemning Linda Sarsour's anti-Semitic bigotry and the decision to make her the keynote speaker at the conference.

This is what we have heard many educators refer to as a “teachable moment.” If the student organizers invited Linda Sarsour out of ignorance of her hateful, racist record, then it is up to you as an educator to make them aware of it. If the student organizers actually knew about Linda Sarsour's bigotry toward Jews and Israel and invited her to speak at the conference anyway, then you should likewise be educating these students as to why Ms. Sarsour's behavior is anti-Semitic, hurtful to members of the Jewish community, and against the values of the University.

2. Urge the conference organizers to rescind the invitation to Ms. Sarsour and choose someone genuinely deserving to deliver the keynote address. If the invitation is not rescinded, and Ms. Sarsour is honored with a prominent podium at the conference, then it will send the message – intended or not –that the School and the University are places where anti-Semitic bigotry, and anti-Semites like Linda Sarsour, are welcome.

Thank you. We look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,



Morton A. Klein
National President



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Leore Ben-David
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