

Dear Associated Students Board of Directors,

I appreciated our meeting last week, and the chance it afforded me to hear about your work and to reflect on the significant challenges your board has been facing. I remain inspired by your collective commitment to leading our student body, particularly through such challenging and complex matters as the ones you have recently addressed.

Thank you to all who worked through the resolution process, including the AS Board, as well as students from GUPS, SF Hillel, and the many others who shared personal experiences. I watched both the Student Justice and Equity Committee and AS Board meetings. I was moved by the compelling personal narratives shared by many and struck by the common themes that I heard from people from seemingly different backgrounds: a passion for self-determination and sovereignty, a need for greater safety, and a desire to create greater awareness and acknowledgement of each other's perspectives. In addition, we heard from people of seemingly different backgrounds a deep fear of backlash for speaking publicly and sharing one's identity.

Sadly, though, the comments posted in the chat box during the last meeting were at times incredibly divisive, hostile and occasionally unacceptably derisive. Bullying and abusive language create the very circumstances that lead so many of the students I have heard from to feel unsafe. As a University dedicated to education and intellectual inquiry, we should not and cannot tolerate this. I am grateful to those who spoke up in the chat box to stop the bullying and derisive comments. More of us need to do that.

San Francisco State University has had a decades-long challenge creating safe space for discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That these challenges continue to create strife on campus is not for lack of trying to address them. Multiple committees and task forces have worked to address them, and our faculty have also worked to advance a better understanding of the complexities in the region. The University has tried to chart a path embracing intergroup education and collaboration. While the University will never solve this or other global, geopolitical conflicts, we are responsible for creating rich educational experiences for our students that will expand our understanding and deepen our capacity to discuss challenging matters.

In that context, I wish to explain why I cannot support the Resolution in Support of Divestment from Human Rights Violations, and why I cannot support its implementation. I say this with great respect for the commitment to human rights you expressed and for your support for Palestinian students.

As I said when we met, it is heartbreaking to see so many students feeling marginalized and unsafe. We can and must do better. We must model complex conversations and develop nuanced understandings of the many issues confronting us. I am deeply uncomfortable with the binary positions that drove the conversation around the resolution. I also fundamentally disagree with the premise that a single geopolitical issue can serve as a proxy against which to measure an institution's commitment to human rights. I regret that the resolution flattens an incredibly

complex historical and current geopolitical issue into misleading binaries. Some would have us believe that you are either Pro-Palestinian or Pro-Israel; that you are either an antisemite if you oppose Zionism or a racist if you support it. You can only be for or against. These binaries do not do this issue justice nor do they do justice to us as a University. Binary thinking leaves all of us feeling unsafe and fails to address the complex nuances enmeshed in these fraught issues. To present “sides” to this discussion, as if one who is pro-Palestinian cannot also believe in Israel’s right to exist or that one who identifies as Zionist cannot also believe in the right of Palestinians to a future state and self-determination, perpetuates the ill-informed concept that these are mutually exclusive positions and identities.

I applaud and share your commitment to human rights. I respect and will protect the rights of our students to criticize Israel just as they would any other country. I was struck by the acknowledgement some made throughout the process about how little they know—and many of us know—about the historical and current complexities of Israel and Palestine. We need courageous conversations, and we need to listen to one another without demonizing each other. We who are in leadership positions – at the student and administration levels – must hold ourselves accountable to model complex conversations, develop nuanced understandings, and think about how our actions either fuel or stem Islamophobia, antisemitism, academic freedom, freedom of expression, and activism. As Vice President Hellwig said at the end of the last AS meeting, we have a lot of work to do.

Even a quick glance at today’s headlines calls attention to human rights violations across the globe, including in Syria, Belarus, Russia, China, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and right here in the United States. Indeed, the gross violation of voter rights and racial disenfranchisement rampant in our nation is enough to know that we have plenty of work to do at home. While economic pressure is a time-honored approach to precipitate change, a single geopolitical issue cannot serve as a proxy against which to measure an institution’s commitment to human rights. The University cannot advance a divestment position with no global context or acceptance of the complexities at hand.

While I cannot support implementation of the resolution, I applaud and share your commitment to human rights and am deeply committed to working with you and with colleagues across the University to advance our mission and commitments.

I will continue to respect and protect the rights of our students, faculty and staff to criticize any country in the world, including our own.

I will direct our University Foundation and University Corporation to investigate a socially responsible investment strategy. Our aim should be to make the University’s assets grow for the betterment of our students’ academic experience and to grow in a way that invests in the world in which we want to live. I encourage AS to partner with all of our auxiliary boards in doing this with strong student engagement.

We will initiate a faculty, student, and administration collaboration and use our shared governance partnerships to construct a comprehensive plan for educating and training on Islamophobia, antisemitism, and the resurgence of white nationalism that threatens many of our communities—and model how to have these important discussions without blacklisting, red lining, doxing or canceling. My hope is that students graduate from this University with the passion and conviction to advance their firmly held beliefs—and with the ability to know how to engage with those who do not share their perspectives.

We will open the door to a rich conversation filled with the complex thinking that I know this University is capable of holding. At this moment, when our country is so dangerously and deeply divided, SF State must strive to create forums for courageous conversations where listening happens, leading to growth and a deeper understanding, without demonization and marginalization. It will require the same courage that so many mustered to speak their truths last week. By doing so we will model our shared commitment to champion the rights of others to exist and thrive.

I am grateful to you for helping sharpen this conversation, and I look forward to your playing a leadership role in moving our campus community forward. I wish you continued safety and wellness at this challenging time.

Best,

Lynn