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The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

I am writing to express my alarm at the recent news that San Francisco State University (SFSU) is planning to host an online forum in the classrooms of Professors Rabab Abdulhadi and Tomomi Kinukawa, featuring Leila Khaled¹, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), an explicitly Marxist organization² that the U.S. State Department has designated as a terrorist group.³ Mrs. Khaled, the first female to hijack an airliner, is an unrepentant terrorist who continues to boast about her terrorist acts.⁴ According to an admiring biographer, Leila Khaled is “(A) figure of admiration, fascination, and inspiration.”⁵

This is deeply troubling and requires immediate action, up to and including cutting all federal funding and investigating other potential violations of the law.

This event is not merely unseemly, but dangerous. Radicalization is a real problem that leads to real-life violence, particularly when efforts are aimed at impressionable young people. Indeed, it appears to be the purpose of this event. Professor Abdulhadi, one of the events hosts, is a founding member of the antisemitic BDS movement⁶ and the director of SFSU’s Arab and

¹ “Palestinian Hijacker Leila Khaled To Speak At San Francisco State University This Month” By: Stephen Sorace, September 9, 2020, Fox News. Available at: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/palestinian-hijacker-leila-khaled-to-speak-at-san-francisco-state-university-this-month>

² Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Encyclopaedia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Popular-Front-for-the-Liberation-of-Palestine>

³ Terrorist Designations and State Sponsors of Terrorism - Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Bureau of Counterterrorism. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

⁴ “I Had to Be the Voice of Women!: The First Female Hijacker Shares Her Story” by: Leila Ettachfani, August 4, 2016, Vice. Available at: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9k99k7/leila-khaled-first-female-hijacker-profile

⁵ “Leila Khaled: The Poster Girl of Palestinian Militancy,” By: Sarah Irving, Pluto Press. Available at: <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/leila-khaled-the-poster-girl-of-palestinian-militancy-international-womans-day/>

⁶ US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, About Us. Available at: <https://usacbi.org/about-us/>

Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas/Race and Resistance Studies. She has stated on her own Facebook page that it she is “honored” to host Mrs. Khaled and that her “steadfastness, resilience and resistance has and continues to be a huge inspiration to me and to generations of Palestinian women.”⁷ Such efforts to legitimize Khaled’s violent past runs a very real risk of helping to create home-grown terrorists through radicalization.

Particularly as one of the chief sponsors of the Taylor Force Act, aimed at stopping payments to terrorists by the Palestinian Authority, I am deeply troubled that federal dollars may be used to subsidize an event that gives a Palestinian terrorist like Mrs. Khaled an academic platform to spread her toxic ideology. While Professor Abdulhadi has a right to her views, no matter how toxic, using her position at SFSU to host a non-citizen and an admitted member of a terrorist organization, who has actually committed terrorist acts, is something quite different. It may well be against the law. Although I am aware of no specific court case involving an identical situation, it is clear to me that providing technology services and forums to terrorists would contradict material support laws, an opinion I share with some legal experts.⁸ Indeed, it is only due to these technological services that this event is even possible. Mrs. Khaled would surely be denied a visa were she to attempt to travel to the U.S., just as she’s been denied entry to other countries, including Italy⁹ and the United Kingdom,¹⁰ in recent years.

Unfortunately, this is not occurring in a vacuum. SFSU has a long history of consorting with terrorists and openly works to create institutional relationships between SFSU and assorted radical organizations and individuals, as well as a history of antisemitism.

For example, Professor Abdulhadi was instrumental in arranging a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with An-Naja University, which is described by the Hamas terrorist organization as a “greenhouse for martyrs.”¹¹ Middle East scholars concur, saying it is a hotbed of terrorist recruitment.¹² In fact, it seems that this event was born out of this venture, as Professor Abdulhadi met with Mrs. Khaled during a trip to the West Bank aimed at establishing this MOU.¹³

⁷ Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi, Facebook. Posted August 28, 7:00pm. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/rabab.abdulhadi/posts/10157589117783123>

⁸ "U.S. Think Tank Under Fire for Hosting Top Iranian Official," By: Adam Kredo, September 15, 2020, The Washington Free Beacon. Available at: <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/u-s-think-tank-under-fire-for-hosting-top-iranian-official/>

⁹ "Palestinian terrorist Leila Khaled barred from entering Italy" December 6, 2017, Times of Israel. Available at: <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-terrorist-leila-khaled-barred-from-entering-italy/>

¹⁰ "Knowledge Session: Who is Leila Khaled?" By: Rishma Dhaliwal, December 14, 2014, I Am Hip-Hop. Available at: <https://www.iamhiphopmagazine.com/knowledge-session-leila-khaled/>

¹¹ "A California University's Troubling Terrorism Ties" By: Cinnamon Stillwell, Independent Review Journal, July 1, 2016. Available at: <https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/23652/a-california-university-troubling-terrorism-ties>

¹² "Teaching Terror: How Hamas Radicalizes Palestinian Society" By: Matthew Levitt, February 12, 2007. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/teaching-terror-how-hamas-radicalizes-palestinian-society>

¹³ "Why are taxpayer dollars helping American terrorists meet with Palestinian radicals?" By: Cliff Smith and Cinnamon Stillwell, January 24, 2017, Washington Examiner. Available at:

But while SFSU is hosting terrorists and making connections with terror-connected Palestinian universities, its refusal to provide a safe forum for former Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat resulted in multiple events disrupted or canceled. This anti-Semitism was so egregious that SFSU settled out of court with Jewish students who sued for violations of their civil rights.¹⁴ The double-standard is breathtaking and, particularly in light of this current event, should be considered part of an ongoing problem of anti-Semitism at SFSU. Particularly given President Trump's executive order on anti-Semitism, this concern should be taken seriously as well.¹⁵

Due to all of the above, I ask that an investigation be launched into SFSU's conduct in this matter, and that any and all federal funds given to SFSU, directly or indirectly, be canceled in accordance with applicable laws. Moreover, given the potential for material support here, I ask that the Treasury Department investigate SFSU's hosting of this event for potential breaches of material support laws. To that end, I am sending a copy of this letter to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin as well.

The rights of Americans to speak their mind is unquestionable under the First Amendment, and principles of academic freedom should be guarded. But providing a digital forum and platform for an admitted member of a terrorist organization who has unrepentantly committed terrorist acts is not speech or academic inquiry. Rather, it is aiding the dissemination of terrorist propaganda and materially supporting terrorism.

Sincerely,



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/why-are-taxpayer-dollars-helping-american-terrorists-meet-with-palestinian-radicals>

¹⁴ "Jewish students settle discrimination lawsuit against SF State University" Times of Israel, March 22, 2019. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-students-settle-discrimination-lawsuit-against-sf-state-university/#gs.gfmwmg>

¹⁵ Executive Order on Combating Anti-Semitism, Issued on December 11, 2019. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-anti-semitism/>