

Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi's email to SFSU President and Colleagues

Sent: Friday, November 6, 2020 12:29 PM

Subject: Why I am not attending the meeting President Mahoney and Provost Summit called for today

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to let you know that I could not in good conscience participate today in the meeting President Mahoney and Provost Summit called for but I wanted to wait so as not to influence your own decision as to whether to attend. In addition to my own explanation here, please see below the email sent by Saliem Shehadeh, doctoral candidate (anthropology) and Dr. Loubna Qutami, assistant professor, at UCLA. Both Saliem and Loubna are former AMED Studies graduate students and are writing on behalf of a broad coalition to President Mahoney and chancellor White.

I could not participate because, while President Mahoney and Provost Summit say that they want to support Arab and Muslim faculty, they do not mention Palestine at all, the major issue we and everyone else have been concerned with, and that impacts academic freedom in actions and not only in public statements. This is not a simple omission but a serious one, given that Palestine is the radioactive center of Islamophobia and Anti-Arab discrimination. By omitting Palestine, President Mahoney and Provost Summit are effectively removing the actual source, and covering over a people who have historically been willed into nonexistence.

Other reasons for my inability to attend this meeting include the exclusion of my colleague, Professor Kinukawa, Faculty lecturer in Women and Gender Studies, who co-organized with me the September 23rd webinar, "Whose Narratives? Gender, Justice and Resistance: A Conversation with Leila Khaled," that was censored by Zoom, with whom the university has an exclusive contract. In her third statement (9/23), President Mahoney expressed a sympathetic understanding for Zoom's censorship of our open classroom and thus sanctioned the private tech company's decision to have a veto power over the content of our classrooms and thus our academic freedom to our own curriculum.

President Mahoney did not once reach out to either of us throughout the whole ordeal. She has not apologized to us for participating in the smear pro-Israel campaign that distorted our intent and made false accusations against us. Instead, our university president chose to reproduce the same Islamophobic, Orientalist and anti-Palestinian rhetoric that we're more likely to hear from the lips of George W. Bush, Ariel Sharon, Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu than from intellectual scholars who should know better, or at the very least engage in the study of the history and context of Palestine, to know better. They could have directly asked us about our own pedagogical choices and goals before passing a faulty judgement that neither reflects our own nor the body of credible scholarship of the fields of women and gender studies, critical ethnic Studies, Palestine, and Middle East, to name a few.

The meeting President Mahoney and Provost Summit called for today rings hollow in our ears. It seems designed to cover up a very problematic approach to administration-faculty relations. Our President and Provost seem more concerned with placating wealthy Zionist donors than with the safety and protection of their faculty members. In her various statements, President Mahoney acknowledged that she was meeting with groups that she labeled as representative of the Jewish community, thus painting all Jews with one brush. President Mahoney also conflated anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism thus feeding into the defamation campaigns against us even though I was cleared of every single false claims.

As for Provost Summit, she too participated in this smearing and intimidating campaign by labeling it as “controversial” during the Faculty Senate meeting on September 22nd, thus feeding into the exceptional treatment of Palestine and to rendering it outside acceptable topics we critically teach and research. President Mahoney also pursued a similar rhetorical tactic when she assigned a hierarchy to “conflict-free” topics, presumably as opposed to our “conflict” ridden open classroom. The scare tactics of Provost Summit were evident in her email in which she threatened that we could face criminal charges and possible imprisonment based on complaints by “some groups and individuals.” In that same email, Provost Summit instructed us to find lawyers on our own instead of providing us with the legal support the university administration should provide its faculty.

As the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost Summit failed to support our 6 classes by leaving it up to us to fend for ourselves with an AT department that she already knew could not provide support due to Zoom’s exclusive contract and due to the lack of captioning and thus disability accommodation. Until this very day, Provost Summit refuses to provide us with the names and emails of the over 1500 people who registered for the Zoom webinar, including many of our anxious students, so we could email them about alternative plans as well as future webinars.

If President Mahoney and Provost Summit are serious about changing things at SFSU, they need to heed the call by our union, California Scholars for Academic Freedom, as well as the hundreds of scholars, academics, students and guests in our webinars, including the survivors and witnesses in the open classroom webinar we held on September 16th, a week before our censored webinar, who demanded not to turn off the microphone. Legal groups, AAUP, and internet neutrality groups have also called for a reversal of the Zoom decision and called on university administrations not to participate in violating academic freedoms in deeds not only in words.

These statements all insist that higher education faculty should be alerted to the threats posed by these private companies on campuses across the country and internationally. It is particularly dangerous for teaching, research and learning about Palestine. It also has serious implications in these very conservative times for universities everywhere as centers of knowledge production about many issues and ideas, particularly those related to gender, sexuality, migration, racism, policing, and the criminalization of Black and Indigenous lives.

Salamat

Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi, PhD
Director and Senior Scholar, Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies

SFSU President's Response to Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi

Sent: Monday, November 9, 2020 1:22 PM

Subject: RE: Why I am not attending the meeting President Mahoney and Provost Summit called for today

Dear Professor Abdulhadi,

I am sorry that you didn't join us last week but, of course, respect your choice. We had a very open discussion about past and recent issues affecting the lives, teaching and scholarship of Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian faculty. I was grateful for the opportunity that our colleagues afforded me to share past experiences, as well as past work on inter-group planning. I think we all look forward to continued discussion and planning. I hope that you will join us in the future.

Best,

Lynn

Lynn Mahoney, Ph.D.

President

San Francisco State University

SFSU President's Notice of the Formation of the Meeting Group

From: Lynn Mahoney <lynnmahoney@sfsu.edu>

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 9:00 PM

Subject: Support for Muslim, Arab and Arab American faculty and colleagues

Dear colleagues,

Recent events, including a resurgence in white supremacist violence and rhetoric, the silencing of Arab and Muslim voices here and abroad, and the use of an implicitly--if not explicitly--Islamophobic federal law to intervene with the academic freedom of faculty, have left

many in our Muslim, Arab and Arab American communities deeply concerned. Provost Jennifer Summit and I share that concern. A couple of you have contacted us directly to engage in conversation: thank you.

I write today to affirm our support for your teaching and scholarship and to offer to meet with you to discuss how the university can best support Muslim, Arab and Arab American faculty and colleagues. I have also reached out to students and community members. To say that this is a challenging time would be to grossly underestimate the problems we face as a nation and a region. I am hopeful that in dialogue and working together, we can provide better support and serve as a key source for the kinds of education and conversations we so desperately need.

I will ask Leshia to schedule a meeting for us later this month or in early November. Please let me know if there are other colleagues we should include. In the meantime, I hope that you and yours are all well and navigating our current challenges well.

Best,

Lynn Mahoney, Ph.D., *President*, San Francisco State University

SFSU President's Email Regarding the Creation of the Second Meeting

From: Lynn Mahoney <lynnmahoney@sfsu.edu>

Sent: Friday, January 15, 2021 2:20 PM

Subject: Support for Arab and Muslim communities at SF State

Dear colleagues,

I hope that this finds you well despite the madness that surrounds us at the moment. I know that preparing for a remote spring has likely left little time for other things, but I do also hope that you were able to enjoy some well-deserved downtime over the break.

Last fall, I had an opportunity to speak with some of you, as well as with student groups and community leaders, about the challenges facing Arab and Muslim student, faculty and staff at SF State. Just as we are rallying as a community to provide holistic support for BLM @ SF State, we must work to better support our Arab and Muslim communities.

I write today to ask you to join a work group the University is forming to both develop plans and to serve in an advisory capacity to me. The group will consist of faculty, students, and community representatives. I am hoping that you will agree to join us. Hala Hijazi, SF Human Rights Commissioner, has agreed to participate with several other community leaders. I will also invite student leaders from GUPS, MSA and MWSA to participate. We will be joined by the provost and colleagues from SAEM.

Last fall's conversations suggested some key areas that require discussion and development, among others:

- Support for our Arab and Muslim students
- Support for faculty teaching and research in Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern studies
- Stronger connections with our local Arab and Muslim communities to both better serve our students and better serve our region
- Developing additional academic opportunities to foster discussion and debate about complex historical and political issues

Persis and Mohammad shared some excellent suggestions after we met last fall, and I am sure that Lucia and Rabab will have much contribute. I do know that all are very busy and will understand if other commitments keep you from participating. We plan on scheduling the first meeting for early February. Please let me know by 1/27 if you would like to join us.

As always, with wishes for good health.

Best,

Lynn Mahoney, Ph.D. (she/her/hers), *President*, San Francisco State University

Submission of Petition to SFSU regarding Supporting Dr. Abdulhadi, Dr. Kinukawa and AMED Studies after the Censorship of Webinar

Sent: Monday, November 2, 2020 12:56 PM

Subject: Petition Regarding the Cancellation of the SFSU Class: "Whose Narratives?"

Dear SFSU President Lynn Mahoney and CSU Chancellor Tim White,

We hope this message finds you well. Please find attached a petition titled "Whose Classrooms? Censorship, Corporate Media and the Suppression of Academic Freedom." The petition has been created in response to the cancellation of the open classroom event "Whose Narratives? Gender, Justice, and Resistance: A Conversation with Leila Khaled" initially scheduled for September 23, 2020.

As you will notice, the petition was signed by over 500 organizations and individuals from across the country and world, professions, disciplines and fields of study. They have come together to assert their solidarity with SFSU Professors Rabab Abdulhadi and Tomomi Kinukawa, Palestine, academic freedom and with the SFSU community affected by the most recent assault on free speech. Signatories include scholars, university administrators and community leaders from all walks of life and a number of national academic associations. We hope you will take the time to

carefully review the calls of the petition and we look forward to hearing from you soon on how we can all move forward.

Best wishes,

Loubna Qutami and Saliem Shehadeh

(AMED Graduate Student Alumni and Former Members of GUPS at SFSU)

Response from SFSU President Regarding Submission of Petition

On Thu, Nov 5, 2020 at 2:53 PM Lynn Mahoney <lynnmahoney@sfsu.edu> wrote:

Dear Loubna and Saliem,

Thank you for reaching out to me to share your concerns. This has been a very painful period for many at the university, compounded by the context of a global pandemic and national political and social crises.

I continue to stand strong in my support of academic freedom and freedom of expression, as does the CSU. Despite great criticism, I remained steadfast in my support of Professors Abdulhadi and Kinukawa's right to host the panel discussion. I never waived from that position. I also expressed my disagreement with the decision by Zoom to cancel the discussion on their platform.

There are, however, legal limits to the right of freedom of expression. As you note, Zoom and others expressed concern that Ms. Khaled's participation in the discussion violated federal criminal law. I refused Zoom's request to cancel the discussion because it was not clear that Ms. Khaled's participation would violate the law based upon the information available at the time. However, Zoom determined there was too much legal risk, not only to the university but to Zoom as well, to allow the discussion to proceed, at least on their platform. These virtual platforms offer new opportunities to bring people together and learn from others even across great distances, but they also present novel questions and challenges.

I hope that what follows is the kind of engaged debate and dissent that I have been advocating for all along. We battle censorship, as we do all things, with education. I have been struck by the lack of legal agreement about what Zoom did. One [legal scholar](#), while disagreeing with what they did, clearly believes it was legal. The [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) believes that it may not have been. Please note, though, that both authors commend the University's strong support for academic freedom.

I remain steadfast in my support for shared governance, for freedom of expression and for the right of faculty to teach their courses and conduct their research without interference. The university employs many different technologies to help faculty deliver instruction to their

students and is committed to giving faculty flexibility in choosing the methods that work best for them and their students. While many choose to utilize Zoom, the university does not require it and supports faculty in deciding how best to teach their courses.

I continue to meet with student, faculty and community groups who have been deeply pained by all this, including those who have been wounded by the censorship of this discussion and the silencing of Arab voices and those wounded by the invitation to Leila Khaled. We must respond with education and fight censorship with more speech.

We have much work to do to educate people about Islamophobia and anti-Arabism, as we do about white supremacy and anti-Semitism. I can imagine a host of speakers and panels that include Arab and Palestinian voices, include a variety of voices from different Jewish communities and include legal scholars debating both Zoom's actions and the implicitly Islamophobic federal law that drove it. There is so much we can do as a University rich in expertise and commitment. I look forward to working together to realize our potential.

Wishing you good health.

Best,

Lynn Mahoney, Ph.D., *President*, San Francisco State University

Response to President's Email

Sent: Friday, November 6, 2020 3:17 PM

Subject: Re: Petition Regarding the Cancellation of the SFSU Class: "Whose Narratives?"

Dear President Mahoney and CSU Chancellor White,

Thank you President Mahoney for your response. We would like to keep the conversation centered on the collectively agreed upon remedies that those signing agreed to present to SFSU and the CSU system. We add them here again. We see that some aspects were discussed while others were not in your response. In order to right these wrongs, we must insist on this.

We ask that you President Mahoney and Chancellor White keep Palestinian scholarship at the center of your responses as we find its absence deeply hurtful in your first response. While Islamophobia, anti-Arabism, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism (as you listed) affect Palestinian experiences, they do not cover the totality of Palestinian experiences. We can not afford to settle on anything less.

We also must briefly note that on the question of alternative platforms, discussions with the SFSU Provost and SFSU IT have clarified that SFSU does not support video-conferencing

software beyond Zoom and other services such as Google Meets or Skype are individual accounts without institutional affiliation. Nor do any of these solutions offer the necessary disability accommodation.

1) SFSU provides an alternative public platform for a rescheduled webinar that assures no students or other participants will be denied the right to attend and hear from Leila Khaled and the other luminaries on the panel.

2) SFSU commits publicly to assuring that it will guarantee respect and protection for the academic freedom of its faculty and follow the protocols of established faculty governance.

3) SFSU's President issues a public apology to Professors Abdulhadi and Kinukawa, their invited guests, and all the 1,500 SFSU students and other participants who registered for the open classroom.

4) Faculty and students across the country demand of their own universities a renewed and firm commitment to defend academic freedom and to resist any monopoly over our curricula by these tech giants and any other powerful external interests. Demand universities END CONTRACTS WITH ZOOM!

Loubna Qutami and Saliem Shehadeh

(AMED Graduate Student Alumni and Former Members of GUPS at SFSU)

Email to SFSU President Regarding Continued Failures of the Meeting

From: Saliem Shehadeh <saliem.shehadeh@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, January 19, 2021 2:53 PM

Subject: Fwd: FW: Support for Arab and Muslim communities at SF State

Dear President Mahoney,

Thanks for your email. I am sending this on behalf of Dr. Abdulhadi as she is recovering from treatment. She is paying me out of pocket to assist her in these matters since DPRC and other administrators barred me from providing her with the assistance she needs.

Dr. Abdulhadi wanted to reiterate that she and the community have already spoken to you and other administrators on this matter. What we would like to see is the institutionalization of the AMED program and an end to the retaliation and disparate treatment against her, AMED and AMED communities and students.

Respectfully, Dr. Abdulhadi would also like an explanation why Palestine continues to be excluded despite its centrality, and how this meeting will differ from meetings past SFSU presidents and administrators held without institutional policy changes or a guaranteed outcome. Can you please confirm that SFSU Administration will reinstate AMED faculty lines, provide AMED with the operating budget and staff, and support the AMED departmental status for which Dr. Abdulhadi was recruited 14 years ago?

Dr. Abdulhadi asked me to include the email Loubna and I sent as well as her email explaining why she did not attend the last meeting.

SFSU President's Response

From: **Lynn Mahoney** <lynnmahoney@sfsu.edu>

Date: Tue, Jan 19, 2021 at 4:53 PM

Subject: RE: FW: Support for Arab and Muslim communities at SF State

Saliem,

We remain committed to supporting AMED and the minor, as funding allows. The email request below, though, was an invitation to participate in a university-wide project. I understand that other commitments may prevent some from joining us. But given Dr. Abdulhadi's expertise and leadership role, I hope that she will agree to participate.

With wishes for good health and a good start to the spring term.

Best,

Lynn