June 5, 2024

To: Chancellor Kim Wilcox
Vice-Chancellor Brian Haynes
Vice Chancellor for Health, Well-Being and Safety, Denise Woods (denise.woods@ucr.edu)
Faculty Marshall David Oglesby
Vice-Chancellor and Chief Diversity Officer Mariam Lam
Graduate Dean Lidia Kos
Chief of Police Jeffrey Talbott (jeffrey.talbott@ucr.edu)

Subject: FJP (Faculty for Justice in Palestine) Letter Condemning Police Intrusion on Graduate Commencement

As faculty who attended the graduation ceremony for new PhDs and MFAs this past Saturday, June 1, 2024, we are writing to communicate our unambiguous repudiation of the intrusion of armed police upon what should have been a joyful communal celebration. When we arrived, we saw more security staff than usual, and police officers everywhere. As dismayed as we were by this, we were shocked when Vice-Chancellor Haynes came to the room in which faculty were lined up to begin our procession. He told us that these police officers were there to protect us. In the context of the mass arrest of students across the state, however, we saw not reassurance but a threat: these officers were there to intimidate and to suppress any possible manifestation of legitimate expression of dissent. Far from a threat, dissent is a crucial part of fostering the conditions for intellectual curiosity and artistic inventiveness, the very things we were there to celebrate. With the possible and rare exception of an immediate threat to life, under no circumstance should armed police be deployed on our campus: it is a self-evident violation of the spirit if not the letter of our Principles of Community, exacerbated in this case by its clearly preemptive purpose.

We are especially disturbed by the invocation of "safety" as the rationale for this violent intrusion on our ceremony, which can only mean that the rubric of "safety" is now to be routinely weaponized in order to justify the threatening presence of a militarized police force on our campus despite all the efforts that have been made in recent years to transform the meaning and procedures of our so-called department of campus safety. This abuse of the language of safety is continuous with the Chancellor's egregious accusation in a letter of May 3, 2024 to UCR Foundation Donors that the recent Students for Justice in Palestine encampment was removed on the grounds "that a long-term encampment on our campus was not viable if we were to have our campus community feel safe," a statement that accepts the spurious accusation that an entirely peaceful and warm-spirited protest posed a threat to those whom the Chancellor grossly identifies as "our Jewish students." Such insinuations clearly defame and discriminate against the Palestinian, Muslim and Arab students organizers of the encampment and their supporters, including anti-Zionist Jewish students, as we are now obliged to point out. The Chancellor thus cast a slur on their moral protest against what has now widely been recognized to be a genocidal war against Gaza—that is, against many of these students' families—and represented them as potential aggressors in a tired and familiar trope of Islamophobia and anti-Arab and -Muslim agitation.

By the same token, it is clear to us that the sole reason for the presence of armed police at the graduation ceremony was to forestall any possible protest on behalf of Palestinian rights and in opposition to genocide: on no previous occasion recently has such a force been so disruptively imposed or so provocatively announced, leaving us to draw the only and obvious conclusion. In doing so, we note that on every campus around the country that has been the site of an encampment or similar extended protest, violence has almost everywhere been instigated either by the assault of armed police—at UC Irvine, UC San Francisco, UC Santa Cruz, as well as Dartmouth College, Columbia, and NYU—or by antagonists of the protests permitted access to the campus by its police or security details, as we witnessed with great horror at UCLA. The gratuitous introduction of an armed force onto our campus can only be seen as a move towards repressive intimidation that belies any misplaced faith in the Chancellor's much vaunted commitment to "dialogue" and "a safe environment on campus." We can assure you that none of those of us who attended Saturday's ceremony were made to feel safe by the threat of violence that this police presence posed.

In the name of the safety and protection of our students, we demand that on no further occasion shall the administration preemptively intrude any police force into campus gatherings or resort to armed intimidation, especially when the targets envisaged have been so clearly singled out in discriminatory fashion. And we demand that Vice-Chancellor Haynes publicly apologize for his egregious invocation of campus safety and for his well-documented inaction with regard to the regular and widespread harassment of Palestinian, Muslim and Arab students on our campus.

We await your response with extreme concern for the safety of our students and our greater community.

Signatories, collectively on behalf of UCR Faculty for Justice in Palestine:

Sarita See, Professor
Sherryl Vint, Professor
Jennifer Doyle, Professor
Jeff Sacks, Associate Professor
Anusha Kedhar, Associate Professor
Bronywn Leebaw, Associate Professor
Andrea Denny-Brown, Associate Professor
Maria del Rosario Acosta López, Professor