

TAHRIR Coalition Condemns Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit's Felony Charges Against Protestors Acting in Solidarity with Gaza

ANN ARBOR—On Thursday, May 16, Prosecuting Attorney Eli Savit announced his office would be pursuing felony charges for four individuals for their actions in solidarity with Gaza on November 17, 2023. On this date, we, the TAHRIR Coalition, marched to the administrative building during normal publicly-open business hours to meet with UMich President Santa Ono, and discuss divestment of the at least 6 billion dollars of the U-M endowment invested in the ongoing genocide and occupation of Palestine. But instead of agreeing to a meeting, U-M brought in police from more than ten (10) departments and allowed officers to violently brutalize and assault protestors, resulting in at least 31 reports of violent police misconduct. Incidents include slamming protestors to the ground and ripping off one protestor's hijab. Now, Savit has also chosen to target those who oppose israel's genocide. We echo the U-M Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine (FSJP) [statement](#) and condemn Savit and Assistant Prosecutor Victoria Burton-Harris's choice to target those who oppose israel's genocide and the University's complicity with it. We further condemn the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office's decision to misappropriate public resources to serve the interests of the University, its Regents, and the genocidal state of israel.

Coming nearly six months after the events of November 17th, we recognize that the felony charges against pro-Palestine protestors have nothing to do with public safety, but are solely an intimidation tactic aimed at repressing the popular movement for Palestinian liberation that has erupted across American universities. Not only does Savit's announcement of these charges coincide with Santa Ono's upcoming congressional hearing, they also come immediately after Nakba Day (May 15), when we posted our demands for divestment at the houses of several regents, and after 25 days of our Gaza Solidarity Encampment. These charges are a direct result of the increased push for accountability that this powerful movement is demanding. Indeed, Savit has not announced charges for any of the numerous police officers who were involved in violence against students on November 17 or during any of the many other instances of unnecessary police violence against pro-Palestinian protestors at UMich. This is an egregious betrayal of the allegedly abolitionist platform that Eli Savit and Victoria Burton-Harris were elected on in 2020.

Savit's criminal charges are one of the more extreme parts of UMich's campaign to silence pro-Palestinian activism since October 7. To date, the university has summoned at least 15 students to Office of Student Conflict Resolution (OSCR) hearings to discuss "possible violations" of the UM Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities based on the events of November 17. (Notably, UMich sent many of these summons just before Savit announced the felony charges.) In March, the Regents attempted to institute a "Disruptive Activity Policy" that [effectively banned all campus protests](#), before backing down in the face of collective resistance from faculty, students, and staff across the University community. Nor is this the first time that Santa Ono has been [implicated](#) as a university president in campus police violence. Regents have made abundantly clear that their goal is to preserve their ability to support israel and its genocide, and they are willing to abuse any and all of their

powers to do so.

We also reject Savit and the University's attempt to single out these protestors' actions as "cross[ing] every conceivable line that might be drawn." This is an attempt to draw a distinction between "good" and "bad" protest in hopes that the community will not support those they have chosen to charge. But, as we have witnessed in the past 7 months both in Gaza, and increasingly so on American campuses, the violence of the police and the Zionist colonial project will always far exceed that of those who resist it. By continuing to fund the genocide with our endowment when over 35,000 Palestinians have been slaughtered by the apartheid state of Israel, and over 1 million are on the brink of starvation, and by persistently subjecting the student-led movement to repression and police violence, it is the Regents who have crossed "every conceivable line," forfeiting moral responsibilities and human decency. We stand firmly behind the actions of these protestors, and call on our community to do so as well. Through our collective power, we pressured Savit to drop trespassing charges for 41 protestors. We will do it again, for our comrades, and for Gaza.

We are part of a global movement for the liberation of Palestine, and neither criminal nor disciplinary charges can diminish our commitment to Gaza and the Palestinian people. We reassert our [demands](#): 1) divest from Israeli apartheid and genocide, 2) establish a People's Audit of UMich finances, 3) boycott Israeli institutions, and 4) abolish campus police and reallocate its budget toward a non-police, unarmed crisis response program. Our struggle for Gaza has repeatedly shown us that the racist criminal-legal system, including campus police and Prosecuting Attorney Eli Savit, threaten our safety as well as our humanity. We draw inspiration from UMich's rich legacy of political movements, including the student-led campaign to divest from South African apartheid in the 1970s and 80s, which was met with similar repression from the then Regents. Despite the University's continued attempts to intimidate and silence us for challenging their deeply unethical investments, we will persist until all charges are dropped and our University divests from Israeli genocide and apartheid. Drop the charges, and divest now!