May 30, 2007

Dear Friends,

Many people have written to me about recent events on college campuses in Southern California with great outrage and fear for Jewish students. In this open letter to the Jewish community I share what I have witnessed on our campuses. I have included links to photos and videos that best represent what is going on.

Jewish students at our campuses have plenty of external challenges today - pressure to assimilate and loose their Jewish identity as well as anti-Jewish racism and anti-Israel propaganda. Jewish students also face a lack of communal support and leadership and have few campus leaders. This is compounded by their own ambiguous Jewish identity, limited Jewish education, concern for jeopardizing their academic success and they end up feeling disempowered to respond to campus events.

At the end of this letter I outline some suggestions for how to resolve this persistent and important Jewish communal issue.

I look forward to being in touch with you about these issues on a more regular basis, and feel free to write to me personally if you want to become more involved in helping Jewish students on campus.

Best wishes of good health and peace,

Rabbi Yonah
Campus Rabbi

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Local Pro-Israel Blogs
reutcohen.blogspot.com
rabbiyonah.com
ucintifada.com
beachhillel.com
jewishstudentservices.com
ucitaskforce.wordpress.com

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Surge in Campus Anti-Semitism this Spring

Each Spring, University of California, Irvine is host to the largest campus-based anti-Jewish racist campaign in the United States. This organized, coordinated, and well-funded series of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel events is vigorously defended and enabled by the University without condemnation.

The frenzy of hate and pro-Jihad sentiment runs so high, it over-flows into full scale intimidation, harassment and even assault. The US Civil Rights Commission has an ongoing investigation of the school to ascertain if Jewish students civil rights are being violated. UC Irvine has, in my estimation, the ignoble distinction of being number one in the following dubious categories:

- #1 Campus hospitable to anti-Jewish racism.
- #1 Campus student group (MSU) that supports and sympathizes with terrorist organizations such as Hamas & Hezbollah.
- #1 Campus in appropriating and desecrating the memory of Jewish victims of the Nazis.

The Carter Visit

On May 3, Chancellor Michael Drake and 3,400 students, faculty, staff and alumni attended a lecture by former President Jimmy Carter, who discussed his new book, Palestine Peace Not Apartheid. It was an impassioned anti-Israel propaganda speech which was applauded by the entire governing administration of the school.

And why did Carter pick UCI? He spoke at two campuses in California, Berkeley and Irvine. As the pictures on the UCI website show, they were only too happy to give a platform for his highly divisive speech telling students that most of Congress is controlled by Jews and AIPAC. A UCI Student told me that Carter's speech turned his fellow classmates and friends against Israel.

There was no visible community or campus protest even though Carter's well-known venom has been spread around the country and media for months. The only response was some flyers printed by LA's StandWithUs and a few people handing them out. Meanwhile, thousands of students and staff from the University were on one side of the ropes, and a couple of Jews were on the other side with flyers.

The UC Intifada

Then came the Muslims Student Union's turn to discredit and defame Israel and call for it's destruction! The latest manifestation of the UC Intifada was two weeks of anti-Israel programming: Holocaust [sic] Memorial Week, and Israel: Apartheid Resurrected Week.

Almost two weeks of speeches where Israel and Jews were falsely accused and maligned. Among the speakers were a radical Islamic leaders, Imam Musa, Abdel Malik Ali, and Al-Asi who subscribe to anti-Jewish and anti-American conspiracy theories and professes Islamic superiority, and Ward Churchill, the notorious professor in Colorado. In addition, the annual visit of Dovid Weiss, the infamous member of Neturei Karta who publicly calls for the end of Israel and sides with Iran, Hezbollah and all enemies of Israel.

Jewish Student Documents Anti-Israel and Anti-Jewish Events

Reut Cohen, an aspiring journalist and Jewish activist graduating from UCI, has news, film footage and interviews of what is going on at UCI on her blog reutcohen.blogspot.com. Reut Cohen has documented the violations of student codes and intimidation techniques used by the MSU at UCI, including videos of a photographer being bullied out of an open lecture. Reut herself was harassed repeatedly by a Muslim woman with a camera as Reut tried to record the speeches.
I have witnessed the repeated use of cameras to intimidate and harass Jewish students at UCI, Long Beach State, and Fullerton State. Members of the group, usually women, come up close to the faces of the students and photograph and record them.

**Death to Israel**

The MSU crafted a program again geared to inflame Muslim hatred against Jews and America, insult and defame the Jewish community with Neturei Karta, and equated Jews and Israel with Nazis, calling Jews the "New Nazis". During the weeklong program "Israel: Apartheid Resurrected" the Muslim Student Union erected a sixty foot long "apartheid wall" covered in horrific accusations against Israel, libel, and fiction.

Speeches each day were designed to foment as much hate against Israel and Jews as possible. The speakers blamed Jewish conspiracies for destroying the world, killing innocents, enriching themselves.

The level of vitriol and hate only increases each year, the level of belligerence and bullying increases, and the level of organization and funding they have also increases.

**American Idol Jihad and Clowns for Israel**

During the last two year's I have responded to these weeks by organizing student protests, holding signs, singing songs of peace in the face of hatred, and hoping that more Jews would too. This year I tried something different when I saw the ineffective Jewish presence at the Jihad programs.

My own response to this fiasco was to openly mock and parody the most racist and hateful speeches with a clown routine and a mock TV Show.

Volunteers held aloft a banner that read “American Idol Jihad Edition” and handed out hundreds of "ballots" which pointed out the sickness in the speech by Malik Ali, who we identified using his birth name Derek Gilliam. We then videotaped these antics and created an online video. The video of my mock TV Show, American Idol Jihad Edition, which portrays the virulent Anti-Semitism at UCI, has been viewed over 20,000 times online since May 19th.

Humor can go where force cannot take us.

By dressing up and clowning during the Neturei Karta speech—which called for the end of Israel— I drew attention away from their “clown.” We drew laughter and support from students. Muslim students yelled obscenities and tried to block us from clowning. It was due to the heavy police presence that the three Jewish clowns were not assaulted.

Twenty students and staff began a spontaneous rally when the MSA signaled they would be marching through campus. We sang Am Yisrael Chai and other folk songs, and Hatikva. It was the most empowering moment for those students. Imagine if we had 200 students, staff and community singing Am Yisrael Chai. Or 2000…

**What was the organized Jewish response?**

Observation of the events by some leadership, “interacting with administration officials” and a poorly conceived and implemented counter effort distributing pens and t-shirts launched by on campus Jewish groups. This campaign had limited effect, and did nothing to counter the massive Muslim propaganda machine. When you are being accused of vicious human rights abuses, genocide, and torture, handing out pens that say “got peace got Israel” will not win over a thinking college student.

While public sentiment for Israel is still high, we cannot ignore the erosion of support for Israel and the virulent Jew hatred of these Muslim programs at UC Irvine or elsewhere.
These notorious speakers, Malik Ali and David Weiss (Neturei Karta) called for the end of Israel in 2005, 2006 and this year again. Let’s pray they are wrong.

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ucitaskforce.wordpress.com

See video from UCI at:
Youtube.com
Rabbiyonah.com
Reutcohen.blogspot.com

Rabbi Yonah’s work is supported by the generosity of the Deanna and Allen Alevy Family Foundation.

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We Failed to Act Again

There is an old saying, "failure to prepare is preparing to fail." We all knew that the UC Intifada would return. The major protests during the lecture I organized with Daniel Pipes at UCI in January, showed the strength and commitment of the MSU had not waned and that the campus was ill-prepared to do anything about it.

One result of the weak pro-Israel momentum on campuses in the Southland is that each year Muslim student groups become more aggressive and better financed. Instead of backfiring against them with negative press and a backlash by the University, Muslim anti-Jewish efforts are working.

We as a community have not allocated the resources, staff and funding needed to mount effective pro-Israel campaigns or anti-assimilation efforts.

Last summer when communities responded with millions of dollars for war-stricken Northern Israel, I called for some of those funds to be kept here to battle for Israel in the hearts and minds of Jewish Americans. As anticipated, the Muslim groups used the war Hezbollah started against us as a propaganda tool claiming Jewish war-crimes.

Not one cent from the millions raised was earmarked for effective pro-Israel response at home, Not one cent was left for Jewish students to create effective pro-Israel campaigns.

Our lack of vision and leadership continued this Spring.

It is an embarrassment that Jewish leaders did not turn out en-masse to bear witness and join in protesting the vile anti-Jewish racism at UCI. Where are the Rabbis? Where are the Synagogue Presidents? Where are the students from Jewish schools?

What to do about it?

We must build an alliance of groups on and off campus that are opposed to the Campus Intifada at UC Irvine, and other campuses across the Southland.

Synagogues, youth groups, and local Jewish groups must lobby their members to write letters, make phone calls, and send emails to elected officials, universities, newspapers, and the media to say "no more Jihad against Jews on college campuses in the Southland!"

Local Federation and Jewish organizations must lead by demonstrating vocal opposition to the Jihad on campus and the UC Intifada. Last year after the anti-Israel events the Federations and some local organizations - responding to stinging criticism that they are doing nothing-had some conference calls and issued some letters, but by the end of the summer their efforts were dead.

We don't need letters after the fact telling the community what you did, and take credit for making progress on issues that have only gotten worse.

OC Hillel, Anteaters for Israel and the Federation need to demonstrate that they can use the funds effectively in order to garner more support.

We need a coordinated public relations effort so that our Jewish student's story is being told in the media and not the story of the organizers of the UC Intifada!

Lastly, we must help educate ever Jewish student and member of the community about Israel. Members of our community hold misconceptions about Israel, doubts, and uncertainties that undermine their own connection to the miracle that is the Modern State of Israel. Please contact me if you want to help!

When a Rabbi dressed like a clown is our only line of defense, you know we need help, and fast!