

October 8, 2009

Michael V. Drake, M.D.
Chancellor
University of California, Irvine
The Chancellor's Office
Irvine, CA 92697-1900

Dear Chancellor Drake,

On Sunday, September 20, 2009, the second class of the Olive Tree Initiative (OTI) returned from their travels in Israel and the West Bank. As its largest funder, Jewish Federation has strongly supported the concept and development of OTI from its inception. Prior to departure, we carefully reviewed the trip itinerary with [REDACTED], and reviewed its subsequent updates as additional speakers and site visits were locked in place. We expected, and believed we had, open communication from the program leadership; and we expected, and believed we had received, full disclosure about program details. This is why we were quite surprised to learn, following the recent return of the OTI group, that they conducted an unapproved, off-itinerary meeting on September 16th with Aziz Duwaik, a notable Hamas figure.

We were further distressed to learn that, ostensibly, the students were asked to keep this meeting a secret. We have been informed, by OTI student participants, that they were instructed by [REDACTED] 'not to tell anyone about' the meeting with Duwaik. According to the information we received, the students were given two reasons to keep the meeting under wraps: (1) to avoid being detained upon reentering Israel from the West Bank or being held at the airport before leaving the country; and (2) to avoid confrontation with anyone who would have disagreed with this meeting had they known about it in advance – namely, Orange County Jewish community and leadership, and UCI administration. Yet we know the decision to meet with Duwaik was not made in a vacuum. One UCI faculty member and two UCI doctoral candidates were in charge of arrangements on the ground. [REDACTED] was well aware of Jewish Federation's 'red lines' – what could and could not be done on an OTI trip. Taking UCI to meet a Hamas leader crossed those red lines, and put the University and Jewish Federation in a precarious situation. We are deeply troubled that this incident could, potentially, derail the substantial progress we have made together in building multicultural bridges at UCI.

To guide you in your thought process surrounding the significance of this incident, please know that although Aziz Duwaik is the current Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, he has been a leader of Hamas for many years. Hamas recognizes him as the President of the Palestinian Authority. The United States, the State of Israel, the EU and other countries do not recognize the legitimacy of Duwaik's Presidency, largely because *Hamas is classified as a terrorist organization*.

Community and National Partners

ADL, American Jewish Committee, BBYO, Bureau of Jewish Education, Community Foundation of the Jewish Federation, The Hebrew Academy, HIAS, Hillel Foundation, Jewish Family Service, Merage Jewish Community Center, Morasha Jewish Day School, Tarbut V' Torah Community Day School and United Jewish Communities

Further, we believe it is disgraceful if, as we've been told, [REDACTED] in fact asked the students to be dishonest about the meeting with Duwaik. This causes us to question [REDACTED] judgment and [REDACTED] ability to pass ethical values to students, and we believe the core values and the academic integrity of OTI have been severely compromised. Not once, given an abundance of opportunities, did he inform us, verbally or in writing, of the involvement (or potential involvement) of Aziz Duwaik as an OTI guest speaker.

The leading newspaper in Israel, Yediot Aharonot, has done a story about the Olive Tree Initiative and may do a follow-up. The OTI students will present to the Orange County community on October 13th. In either context, we recognize the possibility that the Hamas visit will be brought to light. Should this happen, UCI and Jewish Federation may find themselves, however well-intended, at the forefront of the controversy. We expect that many in our Jewish community – in OC, nationally and around the world -- will be astonished and furious that a Jewish organization would sponsor any program that directly exposed students to a leader of a recognized terrorist organization. Our community's relations with the Israeli government may be affected, and there may be cause for action by our parent organization, United Jewish Communities.

This occurs on the heels of learning that the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) has written a letter to UCI concerning the Muslim Student Union-sponsored George Galloway program/fundraiser that took on place on campus in May 2009. The ZOA has reason to believe that this fundraiser may have provided material support to Hamas in July 2009. While this is an entirely separate issue from the OTI concerns, you should take into account the possibility that both issues involve Hamas and could be linked in any media story.

We are sure you can understand how disturbed we are by this turn of events. UCI and Jewish Federation have both worked so hard to take positive steps on campus. Together, we have made significant progress in strengthening Jewish student life, supporting educational and intellectual dialogue, and building multicultural bridges through OTI and other initiatives. We believe the work we have done has helped to reverse UCI's reputation in some circles as an anti-Semitic anti-Israel campus. Every positive step we have taken toward greater cooperation, respect and appreciation is now at risk of being destroyed by this series of events.

We ask that UCI conduct a full investigation into the planning and execution of the Duwaik meeting during the OTI trip, as well as the alleged directive to keep the meeting a secret from communal and university leadership. After the facts of this investigation are known, we encourage that proper disciplinary measures be enforced as appropriate. We appreciate your immediate attention to this matter and would further appreciate timely follow-up.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey H. Margolis
Co-Chair, Rose Project

Dr. James Weiss
Co-Chair, Rose Project

Shalom C. Elcott
President, & CEO
Jewish Federation

cc: Diane Fields Geocaris, Esq., Chief Campus Counsel
Philip N. Kaplan, Chairman of the Board, Jewish Federation