

Jewish Law Students at UC Berkeley Respond to Dean Chemerinsky's Letter and Professor Fisk's Assault on a Law Student

As a group of anti-Zionist Jewish students at Berkeley Law, we condemn Professor Fisk's unjustifiable [physical assault](#) on a student and Dean Chemerinsky's April 10 [statement](#) threatening to levy conduct violations against student protestors. We stand in solidarity with the courageous student protestors at the Dean's dinner on April 9, with Law Students for Justice in Palestine (LSJP), and with our comrades in the movement for a free Palestine on and off campus. We fully endorse LSJP's [statement](#) and encourage everybody to read it and [send an email](#) with their demands to UC Berkeley.

It is only a couple of weeks before Passover, when we, as Jews, are meant to open our homes to strangers and commemorate our own oppression before sitting down to a meal, so that we remember not to be complacent in the oppression of others. Dean Chemerinsky violated that spirit by ejecting a group of students from his home because they intended to peacefully and briefly speak about the oppression of Palestinian people at an event they were invited to.

On April 9, a group of Berkeley Law students attended Dean Chemerinsky's dinner for graduating students — a school-sponsored event — with the intention of peacefully making a statement acknowledging the genocide and starvation taking place in Palestine, and calling for the law school's divestment from weapons producers and defense contractors. One of the attendees was a Palestinian law student who wears a hijab. Before the dinner began, that student stood up and said "Assalmualikum wa rahma tallahi wa barakatu. Peace and blessings on you all," in acknowledgment of the last night of Ramadan. Before the student was able to share any message about Palestine, Dean Chemerinsky began repeatedly yelling, "Please leave" and Professor Fisk physically grabbed her from behind, attempting to seize items in her hands and push her backwards, up the stairs. After this confrontation, the student protestors left.

On April 10, Dean Chemerinsky issued a [public statement](#) in which he neglected to state that Professor Fisk physically grabbed a student, and instead threatened to report student protestors to the Bar Association.

As Jewish anti-Zionist law students, we firmly stand with the student protestors who attended the Dean's dinner and with Law Students for Justice in Palestine. The student protestors were well within their First Amendment rights to speak at a UC sponsored event to which they were invited. We condemn as Islamophobic Professor Fisk's use of physical force against a student and Dean Chemerinsky's characterization of this student's actions as "disruptive" when her only actions at the dinner were to wear a hijab and acknowledge the holiday of Ramadan.

In his statement, the Dean states he is being attacked for "no apparent reason other than I am Jewish." This is simply not true. Students protested the dinner because the Dean is a

[self-avowed Zionist](#) who has used his power as Dean to silence student voices in support of Palestine and uphold the University of California's investment in companies and institutions that participate in apartheid and genocide in Palestine.¹

Anti-Zionism is not antisemitism. The Dean conflates the two concepts, using accusations of antisemitism to delegitimize pro-Palestine speech. As Jewish anti-Zionists, we condemn antisemitism as we fight for the rights of Palestinian people, and simultaneously condemn attempts to weaponize the concept in service of Zionism.

Previously, Dean Chemerinsky promised to retract campus affiliation, funding, and resources from student publications which [signed on to a bylaw](#) supporting Justice in Palestine. When Zionist Berkeley Law students [doxxed their peers](#) for signing that bylaw, resulting in the targeted students' loss of job offers and harassment and stalking by off-campus groups, the Dean failed to take action or admonish the perpetrators. He made [public](#) statements in the [media](#) calling activism for Justice in Palestine antisemitic. He failed to condemn a faculty member who [published an op-ed](#) in the Wall Street Journal calling for employers not to hire Berkeley Law students who have spoken up for Palestine.

The UC invests billions of dollars into defense contractors like Boeing, Lockheed Martin and others. We demand divestment from these companies which are producing the weapons enabling the murder and oppression of the people in Gaza. This is not a radical goal: it is only seeking compliance with the [recent vote by the UN](#) to impose an embargo on weapons shipments and sales to Israel, as [other public universities](#) have.

Dean Chemerinsky has repeatedly mentioned political divides on campus. [He wrote](#), "I hope there will be a time when campus officials can find ways to bring their communities together. But it is not realistic now." In contrast, we know that communal liberation is necessary and must come from and for us all. We have experienced immense solidarity as Jewish students with a broad coalition of anti-Zionist organizers on campus. This includes ongoing discussions about the aesthetic choices made in a recent poster on our campus calling for a boycott of the dinner, imagery which our members had varied reactions to.

As members of a diverse coalition with wide-ranging backgrounds and experiences, we learn from each other and recommit ourselves to our shared values and goals every day. While the Dean uses the poster to shut down conversations about Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza and deflect from his wife's assault on a Berkeley Law student, we are compelled to continue to discuss these horrific realities and our complicity as Berkeley students with what is happening in Gaza, as well as in our own community.

We demand that Dean Chemerinsky and Professor Fisk be held accountable for their reaction and assault on a student peacefully protesting a University event. We will be submitting a

¹UC has [invested](#) over \$2 billion in Blackrock, the largest private investor in [military weapons](#) including [Lockheed Martin](#), [Boeing](#), and [RTX](#), which are currently being used to [kill Palestinians](#).

complaint about this incident, as well as the general hostility, specific threats, and lack of any protection the Dean has given to pro-Palestinian activists and organizations on campus.

We demand that the University of California Berkeley divest from weapons manufacturers that are supplying Israel's genocide in Gaza. Stop funding the genocide!

We reiterate and emphasize LSJP's demands:

- 1) UC Berkeley divests from all investments that profit from the illegal occupation and genocide of Palestine, in accordance with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) movement;
- 2) Professor Fisk and Dean Chemerinsky resign from their positions at Berkeley Law; and
- 3) The inclusion of a Palestine Studies program that centers Palestinian resistance and the right to return in a settler colonial context.