

8 August 2014

Phyllis M Wise, Chancellor
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Urbana IL
USA

Dear Chancellor Wise,

The British Committee for the Universities of Palestine and the Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine, representing academics in Britain and France who seek a just resolution of the Palestinian crisis, are deeply disturbed by the report in [*Inside Higher Education*](#) that your institution, having publicly confirmed the hiring of Professor Steven Salaita as Associate Professor (with tenure) after the customary full review, has now annulled his appointment. According to the same report, you have taken this action as the result of Professor Salaita's tweets and other public statements regarding the recent Israeli offensive in Gaza.

If this report is accurate, your action would be tantamount to firing a tenured faculty member without review or stated grounds. We are particularly disturbed that Professor Salaita's constitutionally protected expression of his views, not disseminated in the name of the university or at its expense, may have served as the stimulus for his dismissal. Having carefully reviewed the cited tweets we have been unable to discover anything that exceeds the limits of strongly expressed and sometimes satirical modes of speech or anything that a reasonable and impartial reviewer could consider to be injurious or racist speech. If there had been questions about Prof. Salaita's "civility" or "collegiality" that would have compromised his work as a teacher or scholar, we find it hard to imagine that they would not have been discovered and addressed far earlier in the hiring process by the committee that vetted his scholarly work and teaching record. But neither "decorum" nor "civility", highly

subjective judgments in any case, have any bearing on the essential right to freedom of expression. Censure or censorship of political rhetoric seriously infringes on the range and manner of allowable expression and subject available to any academic who participates in the public sphere.

Perhaps most alarming are reports that your dismissal of Professor Salaita comes in response to pressure from individuals or organizations opposed to his political views. Increasingly, individuals or organizations are intervening in campus matters across the United States (and Europe), claiming to defend the ethnic or religious sensitivities of students from views they find objectionable. We regard these interventions, which have the effect of chilling freedom of expression, as profound infringements of the freedom of intellectual inquiry and deliberation which is fundamental to university life. Anyone who seeks to limit the free and full expression of any viewpoint, or the representation of perspectives inimical to it, trespasses on a principle of academic life so fundamental that the university would be unimaginable without it.

If, as reports indicate, your dismissal of Professor Salaita is due to such pressures, you will have failed in your duty to defend academic freedom. If your decision was based on the fact or content of Professor Salaita's expression of his views in the public sphere, you have infringed on his rights as a member of the university community and on his first amendment rights under the US Constitution. We urge you to reverse this peremptory decision without delay and to apologize publicly for the pain and anxiety you have caused Professor Salaita and his family.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Rosenhead, Professor Emeritus, London School of Economics, and chair, British Committee for the Universities of Palestine

Ivar Ekeland, président d'honneur de l'Université de Paris-Dauphine et président de l'Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine

Please reply to: BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London WC1N3XX

email: secretary@bricup.org.uk

www.bricup.org.uk