

March 28, 2017

Dear Fr. Joseph M. McShane, S.J.,

As U.S. Catholic academics, clergy, and religious, we are seriously troubled by the refusal [made on December 22nd, 2016] by Dean Eldredge to recognize the Fordham campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to deny the chapter as this is inconsistent with the values of the Gospel as well as both the spirit and practice of Catholic social teaching.

Jesus clearly reaches out to those on the margins and those being unjustly treated by any social, religious, or political groups. Jesus creates conditions for these voices to be heard. Notably, Jesus even takes considerable social and physical risks to do this, even to the point of offering his very life. Catholic social teaching develops this mission for our times and has clearly highlighted the preference for the poor and marginalized, solidarity, human rights, and the common good of all.

In addition, Pope Francis and the Vatican have supported lifting up the voices of Palestinians by recognizing Palestine as a state. The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops has also worked tirelessly to create space for Palestinian voices, while affirming the legitimate needs of Israel. They have spoken out for Palestinian Christians, for those suffering in Gaza, against settlements, and for the programs of Catholic Relief Services in Palestinian territories.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), serving the leaders of U.S. Catholic men's religious institutes, has also worked hard on this issue. Based on the testimony and request from Palestinian Christian religious leaders, CMSM has even challenged those profiting from illegal settlements by endorsing the boycott of such companies.

Yet, Dean Eldredge's email denying the campus chapter stated: "While students are encouraged to promote diverse political points of view, and we encourage conversation and debate on all topics, I cannot support an organization whose sole purpose is advocating political goals of a specific group, and against a specific country, when these goals clearly conflict with and run contrary to the mission and values of the University." As explained above, such denial by a Catholic university seems inconsistent with the mission and values of Jesus and Catholic social teaching. Further, many Catholic academic institutions have permitted Palestinian solidarity groups.<sup>2</sup> Such groups are resisting an illegal occupation, rather than being against a country.

Others have raised concerns that such denial may not only violate First Amendment principles, the non-discriminatory academic principles to which Fordham claims to uphold but also a violation the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>3</sup> Although we are not experts on these issues, we do encourage serious attention to such concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> A recent statement from a collection of Catholic Bishops: <http://catholicnews.org.uk/hlc-final-communique-2017>

<sup>2</sup> Benedictine University, Boston College, DePaul University, Georgetown University, Lewis University, Loyola University – Chicago, Loyola University - New Orleans, Marquette University, Manhattan College, Saint Xavier University, Santa Clara University, Seton Hall University, Saint Joseph's College, University of Dayton

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Overall, we are deeply alarmed by the unjustly censored and isolating message this decision sends to Fordham students and the broader community. We call on the administration and other staff members of Fordham University to recommit and uphold the mission and values of our Catholic tradition by granting the SJP club status with Fordham University.

Respectfully,

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