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Professor Michael Arthur  
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31st October 2016

Dear Professor Arthur,

I am writing to complain about the protest against a talk organised by UCL Friends of Israel Society which took place last Thursday, 27th October, and the behaviour of the President of UCLU Friends of Palestine Society, Yahya Abu Seido.

### **UCLU FRIENDS OF PALESTINE PROTEST**

On 27th October, UCL Friends of Israel Society held a talk which had been discussed in advance with UCL's security team. Due to fears that a violent protest may take place, UCL at first refused to allow the talk to take place in its facilities, but then relented.

The protest itself has been well documented by the event's attendees, who captured much of what transpired on video. The videos show that attendees were intimidated by the protesters and forced to move to another room three times. At one point, two protesters leapt through a window into the room where attendees were sheltering. Three female students were reportedly assaulted. A UCL security guard can be seen on video, overwhelmed by protesters, saying "This is getting out of hand." Police officers were called and a large detachment of officers had to protect attendees and escort them from UCL's premises.

The nature of the protest was intimidatory from the outset, and there is no question that attendees were terrified by the large mob of protesters seeking to surround and trap them.

In judging whether an incident is antisemitic, Campaign Against Antisemitism ("CAA") uses the International Definition of Antisemitism.<sup>1</sup> The definition was developed in 2005 by the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, now the EU Agency for Fundamental

1. <https://antisemitism.uk/definition>

Rights as a “working definition on antisemitism”. It has become the standard definition used around the world, including by the European Parliament, the UK College of Policing, the US Department of State, and the 31 countries comprising the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, including the UK. In 2016, the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee joined Campaign Against Antisemitism’s longstanding call for the British Government and its agencies, as well as all political parties, formally adopt the International Definition of Antisemitism. We would urge UCL to use the same definition.

The definition states that “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic” and therefore we do not consider protests against Israeli policy to be antisemitic.

The definition also states, however, that “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination (e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour)” is antisemitic, hence chants at the protest at UCL of “From the River [Jordan] to the [Mediterranean] Sea, Palestine will be free”<sup>2</sup> were antisemitic because they called for the destruction of the Jewish state and its replacement with a Palestinian state.

It seems clear from footage of the protest that the protesters would have protested in the way that they did against any talk by an Israeli. Almost half of the world’s Jewish population lives in Israel, which is the physical centre of the Jewish religion. There are very few strands of Judaism which renounce all connection with Israel, and demanding that Jewish students at UCL sever all ties with Jews from Israel is *de facto* antisemitic.

Footage of the protesters shows their leader telling attendees at the event: “I hope you guys will think twice now next time you think about coming here.”<sup>2</sup> Whereas criticism of Israel is not antisemitic, this protest was not criticism but part of a deliberate campaign of harassment and bullying, whose targets are overwhelmingly Jewish students.

If reports that three female students were assaulted by the protesters are true, then that is a very serious matter, and the perpetrators must be expelled if they are found to be students.

Earlier this month, you may be aware that the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee released its report into the rise of antisemitism in Britain. In relation to antisemitism at universities, the Committee said that “The unique nature of antisemitism requires a unique response” and that “pro-Palestinian campaigns [must be educated so as to] avoid drawing on antisemitic rhetoric”.<sup>3</sup>

We therefore welcome your announcement that you have instigated an inquiry into security preparations for the event, security at the event, the handling of the protest and the lessons that can be learned. We would ask that you specifically investigate the role of UCLU

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3JwBxZi44Q>

3. [http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/136/13608.htm#\\_idTextAnchor046](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/136/13608.htm#_idTextAnchor046)

Friends of Palestine Society in organising the protest, and pursue disciplinary proceedings against any students identifiable from the video footage who broke UCL's rules, as well as passing evidence to the police where you believe that crimes may have been committed. Additionally, we would strongly encourage UCL to develop specific guidelines on how to ensure free speech on the topic of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict whilst clearly explaining antisemitism and the penalties for engaging in it.

We suggest that your investigation should also cover the role of UCLU in light of its statement on 28th October: "The protests which took place were peaceful on both sides. The protests and events were covered on live social media by both groups involved and a large body of video coverage evidences the peaceful nature of the protests. The presence of the Metropolitan Police force as well as UCL Security at the event was to facilitate peaceful proceeding of events and largely they did a great job of keeping the situation under control and treating both sides fairly, we are however concerned at reports of inappropriate behaviour by security and police officers towards students, which are subject to investigation." It is absurd and extremely worrying that UCLU considers that the protesters were decorous and that the only misdemeanours were committed by UCL staff and police officers.

**We have considerable experience in this area and would like to meet with your investigators and those who develop UCL's guidance for staff and students so that we can offer them our support and advice.**

## **YAHYA ABU SEIDO**

We understand that the leader of the protests on 27th October was Yahya Abu Seido, a student at UCL and the President of UCLU Friends of Palestine.

Though Abu Seido's Twitter account is protected from being viewed by anyone but his followers, his followers have provided us with various extremely concerning tweets which we have decided to provide to you and the Metropolitan Police Service to assist your respective investigations.

On 4th April 2016, Abu Seido retweeted another user who had tweeted an antisemitic quote that "An antisemite used to mean a man who hated Jews. Now it means a man who is hated by Jews." If Abu Seido's retweet was intended as an indication of his approval for that sentiment, then he would appear to be dismissing antisemitism as a valid complaint.

Additionally, Abu Seido clearly believes various conspiracy theories about Jews to be true. The International Definition of Antisemitism states that "Manifestations [of antisemitism] might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity... Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for 'why things go wrong.'" The definition further states that "Making

mendacious, dehumanising, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions” is antisemitic. On 1st July 2015, Abu Seido appeared to claim that Israel is secretly controlling the ISIS, tweeting: “So ISIS threatens to cause rivers of blood in Gaza if they don’t turn back to Allah. If that’s not enough proof that ISIS serves Israel idk”, IDK being shorthand for “then I don’t know what is”. Abu Seido also stated on 15th March 2015 that the media is “Zionist” and on 31st May 2013 that “Zionists own the economy”. On 3rd July 2015, Abu Seido tweeted an image showing former Egyptian President Morsi being plucked from a throne by an eagle with an Israeli flag on one wing, to which he added the caption: “Two years since this happened”.

It is clear from other tweets that Abu Seido believes that Israel should be destroyed, and that appears to be the purpose of his campaigning activity. The International Definition of Antisemitism makes clear that “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination” is antisemitic. In an exchange with another Twitter user on 30th May 2013, Abu Seido was challenged to “renounce [his stated desire for the] destruction of Israel” but Abu Seido responds: “Step 1: Give them their false peace. Step 2: Get stronger, and surprise them with a war they’ll lose”. He continues: “it’s either that, or Palestinian misery continues” before ending the exchange by saying “Israel belonging there is an impediment to peace. Goodbye.” It seems that Abu Seido still holds this position, for example on 20th March 2016, he tweeted: “A day will come in the near future where people will look back at Israel and be absolutely baffled at the fact that such brutality existed”, apparently expressing hope that Israel will cease to exist.

In a tweet dated 6th July 2015, Abu Seido states that the campaign to boycott Israel “will continue to grow until Israel gives up with its Nazism.” The International Definition of Antisemitism states that “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis” is antisemitic.

Abu Seido has also made statements which could be understood to be menacing. On 16th July 2015, Abu Seido tweeted: “Why do little israeli [sic] girls get brave on twitter? [sic]” This could be interpreted as meaning that were Abu Seido to meet Israeli girls in real life, he would intimidate them. Abu Seido has now deleted that tweet. We also wish to draw to your attention that the previously quoted threat captured in video footage of the protest on 27th October that “I hope you guys will think twice now next time you think about coming here” appears from to have been uttered by Abu Seido. The statement makes clear that the attendees at the event should feel threatened by the protest and it could be inferred that the purpose of the protest was to intimidate the attendees.

We have appended the tweets referred to so that they may be used as evidence of misconduct in breach of UCL’s rules. In particular, we refer to UCL’s Code of Conduct for Students and assert that Abu Seido had breached numerous obligations as cited overleaf.

*UCL expects its members to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that does not bring UCL into disrepute, this includes conduct whilst not on UCL premises. Good conduct means:*

- Recognising the diversity of the UCL community and not discriminating against others on the basis of their age, ethnic origin, race, nationality, membership of a national minority, culture, language, religious faith or affiliation or lack thereof, political affiliation or opinions or lack thereof, sex, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, marital status, caring or parental responsibilities, illness, ability or disability, mental health status, medical condition, physical appearance, genetic features, parentage, descent, full or part-time student status, socio-economic background, employment status, trade union affiliation, spent or irrelevant criminal convictions or any other irrelevant distinction.*
- Acting responsibly, being honest, being considerate, respectful and courteous towards others.*
- Behaving in a respectful manner towards others so that they do not feel that they are being harassed or bullied and abiding by the law.*
- Playing your part in maintaining security and being prepared to produce your identity card when requested.*
- Ensuring that any activity you engage in using the internet, including virtual learning environments (e.g. Moodle), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc.), blogs or other web resources, refrains from causing offence and could not be regarded as bullying or harassment.*
- Respecting the right of freedom of speech provided it is within the law.<sup>4</sup>*

**We request that you exercise your powers under UCL Statute 11 to suspend Abu Seido, and that you initiate disciplinary proceedings under UCL Statute 13 for a “major offence” of misconduct as defined by Clause 26 of the Student Disciplinary Code and Procedure in Respect of Students.**

Professor Arthur, Jewish students are currently feeling threatened and isolated, not only at UCL but at universities around the country. UCL has the opportunity and the obligation to show in the firmest possible manner that those who bully, intimidate and harass Jewish students will suffer dire consequences for their actions, and that those who belittle or tolerate antisemitism will similarly be shown no quarter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Gideon Falter  
**CHAIRMAN**

4. Emphasis added by Campaign Against Antisemitism

