

Statement by the Executive Committee of the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies on the Firing of Dr. Steven Salaita

CSAMES Executive Committee: Pradeep Dhillon, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Valerie Hoffman, Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, Laila Hussein Moustafa, Mara Thacker

We are dismayed and disturbed over the unilateral revocation of Steven Salaita's contract by the University administration, without consulting the Department of American Indian Studies, in which he was to be appointed, apparently on the basis of his open opposition to Israel's military onslaught against the civilian population in the besieged Palestinian Gaza.¹ This action is a breach of the principles of shared governance and academic freedom, and its implications are alarming. Irrespective of one's position on the conflict between Israel and Gaza, it is essential to affirm academic freedom as the cornerstone of our scholarly vocation, without which true critical inquiry ceases to exist. We are deeply concerned about what such decisions will do to free and frank scholarship on the Middle East on our campus in these critical times.

Political views and comments expressed as a private citizen have nothing to do with one's competence and qualifications as a scholar. There is nothing anti-Semitic in Dr. Salaita's comments on Twitter; the targets of his criticisms are Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, the illegal and unethical assault on Gaza, and those who support it. There have been instances on our campus and elsewhere in which ardent supporters of Israel have engaged in malicious and unethical actions in order to suppress criticism of Israel and public revelation of the realities of its policies in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, policies that violate international law and outrage moral conscience. The University of Illinois must resist political pressures to silence voices of legitimate outrage.

The firing of Steven Salaita has aroused indignation among academics around the world. At least one senior scholar considered cancelling plans to visit our campus, lest that visit be construed as an endorsement of the University, and specifically of the firing of Dr. Salaita. This indicates the potential repercussions of the University's action for its standing among academics worldwide. For upper administration to rescind an offer that had been approved by an academic unit and college sends a clear message: that the Chancellor's office is willing to exert its power to suppress work valued by expert faculty. This administrative oversight of opinion cannot but have a chilling effect, sending a clear message that professional recognition on this campus is contingent upon the expression of permissible thought. It is also in direct opposition to the administration's frequent proclamations that diversity is a major value informing campus policy.

We call on the University to take the ethical and courageous stance of affirming the principles of academic freedom and shared governance by honorably reinstating Professor Salaita as Associate Professor in the Department of American Indian Studies, ensuring that the key principle in recruiting for our wonderful campus is not political views but academic

¹ *Haaretz* (<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/1.609279>) reports that the Wiesenthal Center protested the hiring of Dr. Salaita to University of Illinois President Robert Easter (http://jewishvoiceny.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8125:wiesenthal-center-calls-ui-professors-controversial-twitter-posts-anti-semitic&catid=102:education&Itemid=285).

qualifications.