

From: Akhil Gopal  
Sent: Wednesday, September 30, 2020 9:15 AM  
To: Ethnic Studies  
Cc: Ellen Brotsky; ESTEE CHANDLER  
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment ESMC Second Field Review

To the Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

Please find attached to this email the public comment of Jewish Voice for Peace - Los Angeles Chapter for the ESMC Second Field Review. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Akhil Gopal  
Jewish Voice for Peace - Los Angeles Chapter

To the Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

Jewish Voice for Peace - Los Angeles, a chapter of a national organization with 70 chapters around the country and over 300,000 supporters, adds our support to the demand for an ethnic studies program true to the original revolutionary spirit of the field, which must incorporate a robust Arab American Studies that rightfully include Palestine liberation within its framework. We also strongly oppose the push by the Anti-Defamation League and other organizations purporting to speak on behalf of Jews to include a contested and problematic definition of antisemitism which conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

Ethnic Studies is a field born in the struggle of colonized and racialized communities, notably Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander peoples, for a liberatory education that connects the racism they experience within the US with global and systemic structures such as capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy. This is what distinguishes a true ethnic studies program from multicultural or diversity studies. The backlash against the inclusion of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle is one manifestation of the same repression that the state of Arizona inflicted upon the Mexican-American studies program in Tucson, or that the California State Board of Education and Hindu nationalist lobbies wielded against South Asian ethnic and religious minorities, Muslims, and oppressed castes as they fought against discriminatory representation and erasure in history textbooks. In each case, the communities struggling for an education that honestly addresses systems of injustice were criminalized and stigmatized as “discriminatory” or “hateful”.

Now the Anti-Defamation League and other Zionist organizations purporting to represent Jews are pushing for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism to be included in the curriculum. The Anti-Defamation League itself is an organization that has been decried by more than 100 organizations, including the Movement for Black Lives, for its own Islamophobia and history of anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and anti-Black racism. The IHRA’s flawed and problematic definition falsely conflates Israel and/or Zionism with Jews, and anti-Zionism with antisemitism. The IHRA definition is by no means authoritative and is in fact opposed by many Jewish organizations in the US and around the world.

For example, according to the IHRA definition of antisemitism, “denying the Jewish People their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor”, is a form of antisemitism. How else should Palestinians understand the State of Israel when they have been living under brutal military occupation, siege, a network of discriminatory laws and tiered citizenship, or have been ethnically cleansed by Israel since its founding, and are still not allowed to return due to being considered “demographic threats”? The IHRA definition brands Palestinians as antisemitic simply for resisting their own dispossession, and paints all of their supporters and co-strugglers with the same brush as well, including anti-Zionist Jews. It also falsely equates the Jewish people with the State of Israel, which contributes to antisemitic notions that Jews are inherently