

Speaking Out Against “Islamofascism Awareness Week”

Right-wing political forces led by the neo-conservative David Horowitz Freedom Center are calling for “Islamofascism Awareness Week” events on campus 22 - 26 October 2007. The call uses rhetoric that recalls 1950s-era anti-communist attack and innuendo. It claims that “In the face of the greatest danger Americans have ever confronted, the academic left has mobilized to create sympathy for the enemy and to fight anyone who rallies Americans to defend themselves.”

The very language of the goals makes clear that this is not solely a racist assault on Muslims, Arabs, Arab-Americans, South Asians and anyone viewed as sympathetic towards those communities. Rather, it is a key part of the strategy to stifle free speech and dissent and to build public and congressional support for illegal and unpopular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for potential future war against Iran, and for Israel’s policies of occupation and apartheid.

Given the clear links between Islamophobia and support for war, the stakes are simply too high to ignore. We should respond to the so-called “Islamofascism Awareness Week” - and to all such provocations - pro-actively, not defensively. Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies has written an analysis to support our responses: “Understanding Why Islamophobia is on the Rise” (www.ips-dc.org and <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/article.php?list=type&type=199>).

Points to Make

When academic freedom is under attack, we should heighten our commitment to free speech and open discussion.

- We protect freedom of speech, even if it includes ideas that we oppose, but we will not protect or enable the climate within which hate speech occurs. Such hate speech creates the environment for hate crimes - which we don’t protect. **We stand for free speech, not hate speech.**

- During World War II, “Japs” were caricatured in racist images with pigtailed, buckteeth, and faulty speech, much as Muslims and Arabs are disparaged in cartoons, films, and popular culture today. In both eras, the racist campaign aimed to build public support for war. **We stand for tolerance, not bigotry.**
- The spread of Islamophobic attacks to campus is aimed at limiting academic discourse to a narrow range of anti-Islamic, anti-Arab, pro-Israeli occupation, and pro-war opinions. **We stand for education, not demagoguery.**

Actions to Take on Campus and in our Communities

- When events such as the so-called “Islamofascism Awareness Week” are called on our campuses or in our communities, we should use the opportunity to build broad coalitions between Muslim, Jewish, Christian, secular, and people of color organizations to fight against all forms of racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other discriminations.
- The newly emerging coalition of academics and scholars at <http://www.defendcriticalthinking.org/> has compiled several useful resources for campus activists.
- At the University of Wisconsin in Madison, the Multicultural Student Center decided to host an event called, “Fighting Racism from Jena to Madison: The True Diversity Forum,” in which opposing the pro-war “Islamofascism Awareness Week” would be a central theme.
- The Muslim Public Affairs Committee has released a set of six tips for challenging the pro-war Week of events (www.mpac.org). See also the analysis by Gary Leupp “Horowitz’s Latest Hate Campaign Heads for Campus” (www.counterpunch.org <<http://www.counterpunch.org>>) and Uri Avneri, “The Mother of all Pretexts” (<http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/avner/1192288533/>).

- The Christian ecumenical Sabeel center in Jerusalem and its Friends of Sabeel organizations in the U.S. (www.fosna.org) have done extensive work challenging Christian Zionist support for Israeli occupation.
- When student-funded or campus facilities are used for events aimed at denigrating or urging discrimination against Muslims, Arabs, or any other national, racial or religious group, we should
- Demand equal time and/or equal funding to organize events that feature alternative anti-discrimination, equality-promoting viewpoints.
- Protest the use of university facilities for hate speech and discrimination.
- When Islamophobic, racist or other actions threaten professors or students, we should circulate petitions to demand re-hiring, reconsideration of denied tenure, or reinstatement.
- If an event is clearly pro-occupation and pro-war, we should demand equality of support for anti-occupation, anti-war and inter-religious events.



The US Campaign is a diverse coalition of over 250 groups working for freedom from occupation and equal rights for all by challenging US policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Campaign is based on human rights and international law, providing a non-sectarian framework for everyone who supports its Call to Action. Its strategy is to inform, educate, and mobilize the public so as to change the US role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- When anti-Arab, anti-Muslim or other racist ideologies are used to build support for war and occupation, we should strengthen ties between peace, social justice, anti-racist, and people of color organizations.

- When the “Los Angeles Eight” Palestinians were arrested in 1987 and threatened with deportation based on Constitutionally-protected free speech activities, one of their earliest supporting organizations was the Japanese-American Citizens League.

- The Center for Democratic Renewal in Atlanta (<http://www.publiceye.org/cdr/cdrwhenh.html>) has published a useful guide called “When Hate Groups Come to Town.”

- The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (<http://www.nrcat.org/>) have planned a campaign in the last week of October to publicize how Muslims are currently the victims of U.S. war policies, and are urging showings of their new film on the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

- When racist, Islamophobic or anti-Semitic demagogues threaten to divide our communities, we should take seriously our obligations to provide education to all our communities - on and off campus - on issues of racism, anti-racism, and the history of community mobilization.

- During the 1980s, for instance, in a hate crime in a small town in Montana, a Jewish family was attacked during the Chanukah holiday. The entire town responded by lighting menorahs (the ritual candles) in their windows to express solidarity.

- The 1982 hate-crime murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese-American man killed in Detroit during anti-Japanese hysteria of the 1980s, was answered with creation of a powerful pan-Asian activist movement against racism. Twenty-five years later, Asian Pacific Americans for Progress and local partners around the country held National Townhall meetings to build opposition to hate crimes in cities across the United States.

Six Reasons to Speak Out!

Extracts from “Understanding Why Islamophobia Is on the Rise” by Phyllis Bennis (www.ips-dc.org and <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/article.php?list=type&type=199>)

1. The invention of Islamophobia, or fear of Muslims or Islam, is a key weapon in the Bush administration strategy for building public and congressional support for illegal and unpopular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for potential future war against Iran, for Israel’s policies of occupation and apartheid, and for a broader drive towards empire.

2. As the threat rises of a new U.S. war against Iran, there is already evidence of a campaign to insult Iran and Iranians dangerously reminiscent of the anti-Islam mobilization that took shape in the relentless demonization of Iran at the time of Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution.

3. The high percentage of Americans who continue to believe the false claim that the ruthless yet secular Saddam Hussein was responsible for the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, indicates a far too widespread inability or unwillingness to distinguish between Islamic and Arab people, countries and movements.

4. While Islam-bashers in the U.S. government, media, academic and other circles are sometimes careful to claim that their hostility to Muslims or Arabs or Islam is limited to the “extremists,” the goal and the impact of these campaigns is in fact to demonize entire countries and communities. As Islamophobic views find increased acceptance in public discourse, there is also a rising danger of growing public acceptance of attacks -including legal discrimination, denial of rights, violent assaults, and more - on U.S. citizens and residents who happen to be Muslim, Arab, or Arab-American. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

(www.adc.org) and other organizations have documented frightening numbers of such attacks.

5. Anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment is not limited to extremist, racist fringe forces; it is reflected in U.S. political, public, academic and media discourse at the highest levels, including from leading U.S. presidential candidates. Senator John McCain says that “since the U.S. was founded on Christian principles” he prefers a Christian president to a Muslim one. Congressman Peter King, top advisor to presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani, says that “unfortunately, we have too many mosques in this country” and that the Muslim community is “a real threat here in this country.”

6. The spread of Islamophobic attacks to campus is aimed at limiting academic discourse to a narrow range of anti-Islamic, anti-Arab, pro-Israel and pro-war opinions. These attacks form part of concerted public pressure to

- Refuse to hire or deny tenure to numerous academics whose work challenges what is defined as “acceptable” mainstream dogma on Middle East and U.S. policy issues;

- Intimidate Middle East scholars through recruitment of students to record classes and lectures with the goal of “exposing” opinions deemed unacceptable;

- Create websites (by organizations such as Campus Watch and others) to undermine the credibility of Middle East scholars who challenge anti-Muslim, pro-war orthodoxy;

- Construct a climate of self-censorship severe enough that many applicants for scarce Middle East studies teaching posts refuse to teach Israel-Palestine history until after achieving tenure.



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