

1 **TESTIMONY BEFORE THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**
2 **GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**
3 **HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 10**
4 **OCTOBER 11, 2017**

5 **WRITTEN PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF NICHOLAS ABDALLAH**
6 **PRESIDENT**
7 **HILLEL CHAPTER, JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY**

8
9 My name is Nicholas Joseph Abdallah, and I am the President of the Hillel chapter at John
10 Carroll University (JCU). Hillel is an international Jewish collegiate organization that promotes
11 their mission of, “Enriching the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish
12 people and the world” through various religious, social, and Zionist programming open to both
13 Jewish and non-Jewish students.

14 In the Spring of 2016, Cleveland Hillel and Christians United For Israel (CUFI) jointly
15 sponsored a speaker event to be held at JCU. The name of the speaker was Kasim Hafeez. The
16 purpose of Kasim’s speech was to share his story of moving from being a radical anti-Israel
17 Jihadist, to becoming a Muslim supporter of Israel. His speech was centered around his
18 upbringing, his original conception of what it meant to live in Israel, and finally how, after
19 visiting Israel, he realized that it was a country that sought to promote peace between itself and
20 the Arab world.

21 On or about April 25th, 2016 Nicolle Simonovic, Zak Zippert, and I were asked by JCU to meet
22 with various faculty, staff, and the members of the campus Muslim Student Society (MSS).
23 Nicolle, Zak, and I comprised the Executive Board of the Hillel chapter at John Carroll. The
24 names of the faculty and staff at the meeting included: Gail Roussey (the Assistant Director of
25 the JCU Campus Ministry), Dr. Sheila McGinn (professor and Chair of the Department of
26 Theology and Religious Studies), Dr. Kyle O’Dell (professor and Senior Director of Student
27 Engagement), and a fourth staff member whose name I cannot recall. The two members of the
28 MSS were El-Ashram Abdellatif and Anas Haroun.

29 The meeting began with a short prayer led by Gail Roussey. Following the prayer, Gail invited
30 the members of the MSS to share and express their grievances in regard to the pro-Israel speaker
31 that we invited come to campus. They began by criticizing our advertising poster. They said that
32 there was no such thing as a radical Muslim, and that if a person is a radical, then they are not
33 Muslim. They continued by saying that the word Jihad means struggle, rather than performing a
34 radical act of destruction, and that the word was misused. They also remarked that they had not

1 found any reputable information about Kasim on the internet, and that they didn't want someone
2 who lacked credibility to speak on the subject.

3 They further stated that in the past, Hillel has brought speakers that have shown anti-Muslim or
4 anti-Arab sentiments, but these statements were untrue. The Northeast Ohio CUFI chapter has a
5 recording of the one previous pro-Israel speaker's presentation on campus. This was Hon.
6 Yoram Ettinger, a retired Israeli diplomat who had served as Israel's Consul General in Texas
7 and as Israel's Ambassador to the United States Congress. Ambassador Ettinger's entire
8 presentation was truthful, and he honestly, reasonably, and politely responded to every question
9 posed to him, including those of the Muslim students in attendance, as the video record clearly
10 shows.

11 However, at that previous event, there was an incident where members of the MSS and the
12 Middle Eastern Student Association began a noisy protest while Ambassador Ettinger was
13 speaking, but he continued his presentation despite the noise.

14 During our meeting with faculty and JCU administrators in April, 2016, members of the MSS
15 also mentioned that they were uncomfortable with having Kasim speak because they believed
16 that the group CUFI lacked credibility, and that it's an extremist group. Anas later stated that it
17 was possible to be pro-Jewish while still being anti-Israel. Gail, Dr. McGinn, and Dr. O'Dell
18 later asked us if this event could be canceled or moved so that more discussion could take place.
19 They believed that because of the situation that occurred a few years back (the Ettinger
20 presentation), there would be an issue at this new specific event. We told them that Kasim was
21 merely going to share his own personal experience, and that Hillel is a Zionist organization that
22 works with groups like CUFI and the Zionist Organization of America. We also informed them
23 that we would be having dinner with Kasim the day of his presentation beforehand.

24 The JCU faculty and administrators then instructed us that we were to let Kasim know what
25 topics were off-limits, essentially limiting his ability to speak openly and truthfully. The meeting
26 ended with the faculty, staff, and members of MSS telling us that we should shift our focus from
27 pro-Israel events to only pro-Jewish events.

28 After the meeting, we decided to move forward with the speaker, and to allow him to speak
honestly about his experience. Since then, we have not invited another pro-Israel speaker to
campus due to fear of having to deal with a situation such as this again.

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