

Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

December 10, 2024

Testimony in Opposition to Adoption of IRHA Definition of Antisemitism in SB 297

Dear Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jineen Musa, and I come to you today as a Palestinian organizer, a student at The Ohio State University (OSU), and a long-time Ohio resident. I am deeply alarmed by the language used in Senate Bill 297 and the far-reaching consequences it will have. If passed, this bill will effectively quell free speech, suppress dissent, and further demonize and criminalize various communities. By adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, this bill equates legitimate criticism of the Israeli regime with that of hate speech. As you must recognize, this creates a dangerous environment where the very foundations of free expression are eroded, leading to the foreseeable targeting of vulnerable communities, those that are already victims of both repression and hate speech alike—particularly, Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, anti-Zionist Jews, and all individuals of conscience advocating for Palestinian liberation.

These are the communities fighting to end the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people—an unfathomable injustice that has lasted over 76 years, rooted in the never-ending Nakba, the initial mass displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians, and now manifesting in its most horrific form in the 431-day bombardment of Gaza.

This bill would say that I, someone who has witnessed day after day, in an ongoing, unending loop, the decimation, the erasure, and the ethnic cleansing of my people, am denied the right to express my disdain over the mutilation of my own.

This bill would say that I, someone who refreshes my phone over and over, just to see if the people I have connected with through GoFundMe campaigns are still alive. These are families who have been desperately trying for 431 days to raise funds to evacuate their loved ones, yet have only managed to raise a fraction of what is needed, buried beneath tens of thousands of other campaigns. Am I expected to watch their suffering and remain silent?

And I ask again: Am I to remain silent, an unwilling accomplice in the massacre of my people—complicit through the very weapons our country provides and, more locally, through the \$262.5 million in Israeli bonds that Ohio is invested in?

If I were to voice my disdain and say, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” or proclaim, “Israel is an apartheid state committing genocide,” these words would be deemed antisemitic under this bill, and I could be punished for expressing them. But let me be clear: the Israeli regime, like any other, must and will be held accountable for its countless human rights violations and war crimes—whether or not this bill is passed into law.

When I speak of the foreseeable demonization and criminalization under this bill, I am not speaking in abstract terms. We have already seen it in action.

College administrations nationwide, and particularly on OSU's campus, have shown a consistent pattern of responding to student dissent with brutal force. The violent crackdown and arrests during the Gaza Solidarity Encampment on April 25—where Ohio State University Police Division (OSUPD) and State Troopers confronted students in riot gear, armed with shields and rubber bullets, and snipers positioned on the student union rooftop—demonstrated an appalling assault on the fundamental right to free speech.

Yet this was not an isolated incident. For months prior, OSU systematically targeted pro-Palestine, anti-genocide students through numerous arrests and repeated harassment through the student code of conduct. Whereas now, the university has enacted draconian policies in an attempt to stifle dissent and prevent further organizing.

If this bill is passed, we will witness an even more dangerous escalation. It will provide legal cover for further repression, targeting vulnerable communities and criminalizing their right to organize and speak out. This bill will only embolden those in power to suppress the voices of anti-genocide activists even more harshly.

I oppose SB 297 in the strongest possible terms—not just because of its moral and political implications, but because it is a direct violation of the freedoms this country claims to protect. I urge you all to reject this bill and uphold the rights of your constituents to express their views freely, without fear of bias, censorship, or repression.