

## **Public Statement**

### **No Institutions are Neutral**

July 10th 2024

On July 5th, staff reported to campus security that a hateful message was posted at the Multifaith Centre at UVic, which contained [death threats specifically targeting Muslims, Iranians, and Palestinians](#). The messages were found early in the morning leading to the Centre's closure and the subsequent cancellation of Friday prayer. While the [police are investigating the source of the message](#), believed to be "hate-motivated," the UVic administration has yet to issue a statement warning the community or condemning the anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian and racist sentiments of the posters.

We note that the lack of such a statement is consistent with the behaviour of an administration that has repeatedly minimized the experiences of Muslim and Palestinian students, staff, and faculty on this campus, and has largely ignored anti-zionist Jewish voices. Since October 2023, University-issued statements about the ongoing genocide in Gaza have referred to it as a "[humanitarian crisis in the Middle East](#)" or used similar phrasing. While they have sometimes echoed the global call for a ceasefire, the university's administration staunchly refuses to examine the extent to which UVic itself is directly or indirectly complicit in the atrocities. For instance, the administration has yet to engage seriously with [students' demands](#) for divestment, instead delaying the matter with assurances of future consultation. For example, We believe it should not be controversial for any institution of higher learning to withdraw funding from actors engaged in [scholasticide](#).

The university has consistently framed the situation in Palestine as one with conflicting and diverse perspectives that must all be balanced and respected. In other words, it appears to be attempting to chart a course of neutrality. Yet neutrality in the face of a [genocide](#) whose [atrocities appear regularly](#) in both [mainstream](#) and [social media](#) is not genuine neutrality, but tacit support. What the university has been attempting to portray as a "measured and balanced approach" as they "navigate a complex situation" is in fact [just a way to maintain the status quo of white supremacy](#).

No social institutions are or can be politically neutral, by their very nature. However, institutions that do not challenge oppressive social systems, thereby prioritizing the

comfort of those who are relatively socially privileged, can *portray* themselves as neutral. Such institutions will issue technically correct statements, all the while claiming that the demands of their marginalized community members are too complex to meet. Rather than committing to any fundamental structural changes, universities will claim to be making space for difficult conversations, [while failing to protect the marginalized people who attempt to speak up in them](#).

Peaceful [protests](#) like [die-ins](#) have been an activist tool for many decades, famously used by AIDS activists to draw attention to the ongoing public health crisis. Yet when students from the Palestine Solidarity Encampment at UVic staged die-ins at the campus [Starbucks](#), the administration did see fit to issue a statement characterizing them as engaging in [intimidating behavior that made people feel unsafe](#). It is unclear why a die-in protesting genocide would make people feel unsafe, though it would almost certainly cause discomfort. And those who live primarily in safety often mistake being uncomfortable for being unsafe.

But we should *all* be uncomfortable that the institution at which we work or study is unwilling to prioritize human life. It is striking that such an action disrupting business operations would merit a quick public statement, and lead university administrators to take an unequivocal stance against intimidation and harassment, while a death threat against primarily Muslim community members that led to the closure of their space of worship on campus for several days would not. We understand from [administrators' statements](#) that the university is committed to "keep[ing] our community safe and supported" and providing "a safe and secure campus." Yet having seen just how little our university is willing to do even to reduce its complicity in an ongoing genocide against Palestinians, perhaps its complacency towards anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian racism should now come as no surprise. The university's current decision to remain silent when Muslim, Palestinian, and [SWANA](#) community members are actively threatened on campus grounds reinforces the low priority currently placed on the safety of UVic's Muslim students, community members, staff, and faculty. Moreover, it highlights a lack of will on the part of administrators to take seriously the lived experiences of its racialized community members in favour of maintaining a culture of complacency and complicity in acts of violence against them.

Again, institutions are not politically neutral, nor are our individual actions. Indeed, the very premise of the [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions \(BDS\)](#) movement is that our individual actions, like our economic choices, can in fact make a difference. The university's decisions about which public statements to make and how to frame the relevant issues are *all* political. Framing the consistent presence of armed police officers on campus as [providing welcome and needed support](#), in contrast with those

who “may not like” their presence is choosing whose voices to prioritize. Police, after all, have a [long history](#) of [harming](#) Indigenous people, Black people, and other racialized minorities on this territory.

There should be no place for anti-Muslim, antisemitic, or other xenophobic rhetoric or acts on this campus. We encourage everyone to consider what it would take for the university to keep its *whole* community safe instead of prioritizing the comfort of some over the safety of others. Situations like these should lead us to reflect on what people and institutions mean when they make claims to neutrality, and what, in fact, our university is prioritizing, when it claims to take a measured approach in this current political climate.

Workers for Palestine