

May 16, 2024

Members of the OSU Palestine Solidarity Coalition:

Like you, we have witnessed with dismay the events in Gaza, Israel and the region that began October 7, 2023. We are deeply saddened by the loss of innocent human lives, and we acknowledge the grief this loss has inflicted on members of the OSU community, both Palestinian and Israeli, who have connections to the region. Following the horrors of October 7, we know violence in the region has disproportionately impacted Gazan civilians.

We know the history of Palestine, Israel and the region is deeply complex, and that imperialism and colonialism have impacted the region in many negative ways, some of which you outline in your letter. We also know that long and persistent histories of anti-Palestinian sentiment and anti-Semitism have shaped events in the region, including presently. We know the current iteration of violence in the region connects to conflicts that are thousands of years old.

We are very aware of the real toll this violence has taken and continues to take on people, Palestinian and Israeli alike. We, like you, hope for a lasting peace and an end to violence in the region.

It's from this awareness that we consider our role as a public university. Oregon State University exists to develop the next generation of leaders by fostering critical inquiry, dialogue and debate. This means ideas – good and bad – must be allowed to surface and be subjected to scrutiny, to be endorsed or challenged, and to rise or fall on their merits. At our best, we are an institution where students, faculty and community members can critically examine global challenges, like ongoing violence in Gaza, and deliberate over lasting solutions. We are here to help prepare students to change the world in ways that are informed by the best knowledge available and that align with their deeply held beliefs and values.

We must not – as an institution – take a position on foreign policy in ways that prevent critical inquiry from taking place. Rather, our mission is to facilitate critical inquiry and to protect the academic freedom and free expression this inquiry requires. This is not a neutral position. Indeed, disagreement and dissent are necessary to the exploration we seek.

We know this is not the role you want OSU to play.

Our planned actions and an invitation to collaborate

This message shares how OSU will continue to work in alignment within its mission, values and role to create positive change related to this issue, and formally invites you to join us in our efforts.

To be clear, this is not an invitation to negotiate. Over the last seven months we, like you, have been considering how the university can meet its mission while responding to global events of consequence that are impacting OSU community members. Prior to the encampment forming earlier this week, it was our belief and understanding that our conversations with you were progressing through good faith engagement. The creation of an encampment represents a fundamental shift in this engagement. The encampment is unauthorized and violates university policies related to free expression and grounds use, among others.

OSU commits to providing for the safety and security of everyone on its campuses. An overnight encampment presents significant challenges to our ability to meet this commitment adequately or consistently. Additionally, the presence of the encampment has and will continue to result in the cancellation of planned events for which paid reservations and non-refundable contracts were made. While you may view this as a necessary inconvenience to advance your cause, this is not the view of the university, which has an obligation to support the programming of all OSU students within university policy.

We fully support the free expression rights of those at the encampment and have consistently provided advice and counsel on how to exercise these rights effectively and safely within the broad allowances of university policy. We will continue to support these rights. However, for the reasons explained above, the overnight encampment must end.

We invite you to join the university in collaboration on implementation of ongoing and planned actions:

- OSU has provided [information](#) about its direct investments on a public website and will update these disclosures annually. The OSU Foundation also provides information about its investments on its website.
- OSU will establish a Task Force on Responsible Investing charged with evaluating the alignment with institutional investment policies with institutional values and priorities, while maintaining compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The task force will make recommendations for any revisions to investment policies to the OSU Board of Trustees for their consideration and potential adoption. This task force will launch by fall term 2024 and engage the OSU community widely. We invite student members of your coalition to participate in this engagement.

- OSU will form a Task Force on Responsible Procurement charged with evaluating the alignment of institutional procurement policies with institutional values and priorities, while maintaining compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The task force will make recommendations for any revisions to procurement policies to the OSU President for consideration and potential adoption. This task force will launch by fall term 2024 and engage the OSU community widely. We invite student members of your coalition to participate in this engagement.
- OSU has and will continue to vigorously protect the free expression and academic freedom rights of all OSU community members, including by resisting any attempt to interfere with the academic freedom of any faculty member. OSU's policies in this area are among the most supportive of free expression in the country. The limits of these policies are narrowly tailored and clearly spelled out. Additionally, OSU staff will continue to counsel OSU students and faculty who wish to learn more about these policies and how to convey their opinions and viewpoints consistent with their responsibilities.
- OSU will continue enforcing university policies prohibiting discriminatory and harassing conduct based on nationality, ethnicity or religion, including prohibited anti-Palestinian and anti-Semitic behavior.
- The creation of curricula and courses of studies, such as Middle Eastern studies, involves shared governance partners and state agencies. We will share information about this process with members of the coalition.
- The university will develop, publish on a public website and publicize a "library guide" that contextualizes the complex and interwoven incidents of displacement and violence that characterize the history and the present of Palestine, Israel and the region. This library guide will allow OSU community members and the public to engage topics of imperialism, colonialism and oppression critically to learn more, make connections to the OSU community and think for themselves. Development of this library guide will begin next month with an intended publication date of fall term 2024. We invite members of your coalition to contribute to this effort.
- To contribute to the alleviation of civilian suffering, OSU will support a university effort to raise funds for the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has worked consistently in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel over the last seven months to provide direct humanitarian aid and advocate for humanitarian protections. We invite the members of your coalition to join in this effort.

The above represents a comprehensive set of actions we believe are aligned with your goals and OSU's mission and values. It is our sincere hope that you will join us in collaboratively advancing these efforts.

Next steps and the path forward

We have clearly indicated that those participating in the overnight encampment are in violation of university policy. To this point, no one has faced any sanction related to their participation in the encampment. There are many vehicles for free expression that are consistent with university policy. An overnight encampment is not one of them.

If the encampment remains after Monday, May 20, or if conditions change in ways that are detrimental to the university community, we will begin using methods available to us to hold participants accountable for violations of policy under the student conduct code and criminal statutes.

If you have questions about our planned actions, please contact the Office of the Dean of Students at deanofstudents@oregonstate.edu. To enhance transparency, this message will be posted on a public website.