

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

February 6, 2024

VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Mr. Jonathan Holloway, President of the University
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
7 College Avenue, 2nd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Mr. William E. Best, Chair of the Board of Governors
c/o Ms. Kimberlee M. Pastva, Secretary of the University
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
7 College Avenue
Winants Hall, Room 112
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Dear President Holloway and Chairman Best:

We write regarding the activities of the Rutgers University Center for Security, Race and Rights (the Center). Founded in 2018, the Center sponsors events featuring anti-Semitic speakers, individuals who justify violence against the State of Israel, terrorist sympathizers, and advocates for domestic radicalism. The Center's Director, Professor Sahar Aziz, "regularly and consistently promote[s] vile antisemitic propaganda."¹ It is troubling that one of America's oldest universities² and New Jersey's flagship public university would house such a Center.

As one example of the Center's activities, on the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the Center sponsored an event titled "*Whose Narrative? 20 Years since September 11, 2001*."³ The event promulgated the narrative that "U.S. imperialism" was to blame for the 9/11 terrorist attacks, featured speakers with known terrorist affiliations, and was widely condemned.

One such speaker at the 9/11 event was Sami Al-Arian, a former professor at the University of South Florida. Mr. Al-Arian was indicted in 2003 for conspiring to provide material support to

¹ Dov Ben-Shimon, *Rutgers University / Call to Action*, JEWISH FED'N OF GREATER METROWEST NJ, <https://www.jfedgmw.org/rutgers-university-call-to-action/>.

² *Our Revolutionary Roots*, RUTGERS, <https://www.rutgers.edu/about/our-revolutionary-roots-history>.

³ The People's Forum NYC, *Whose Narrative? 20 Years Since September 11, 2001*, YOUTUBE (Sep. 11, 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pd0lDqc9N_U.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad.⁴ Palestinian Islamic Jihad, with whom Mr. Al-Arian was associated,⁵ is the second-largest armed group in Gaza.⁶ According to Mr. Al-Arian's indictment, Palestinian Islamic Jihad is an "international terrorist organization with 'cells' or units located throughout the world."⁷ The group's manifesto "rejected 'any peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause, and the affirmation of the Jihad solution and the martyrdom style as the only choice for liberation.'"⁸ Mr. Al-Arian eventually pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to support terrorism, was sentenced to 57 months in prison,⁹ and later was deported.¹⁰

During a December 2021 speech at the Rutgers University Hillel, Congressman Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) unequivocally condemned the Center for Security, Race and Rights for hosting the event:

At an event marking the twentieth anniversary of September 11, Rutgers' Center for Security, Race and Rights held an event with several controversial speakers, including those who have ties to terrorist organizations. It is unconscionable that a day meant to reflect on the deadliest attack on United States soil was used to provide a platform to those affiliated with Palestinian Islamic Jihad — a foreign terrorist organization designated by the United States. There is simply no reason why those with ties to militant terrorist organizations, groups who have killed civilians, deserve a podium to students here at Rutgers.¹¹

Similarly, Jason Shames, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, stated that the Center's 9/11 event sought to "delegitimize Israel and to push their antisemitic agenda into a mainstream discourse."¹²

Controversial events like this are not an anomaly. Only three days after the brutal October 7th massacre, the Center hosted an event titled "Psychoanalysis Under Occupation: Practicing Resistance in Palestine."¹³ A speaker (Center faculty affiliate Dr. Lara Sheehi) opened the talk saying "Zionist settler colonialism is a structure that is the provocation."¹⁴ A few weeks later,

⁴ Indictment, *United States v. Sami Amin Al-Arian, et al.* No. 8:03-cr-77, U.S. Dist. Ct. M.D. Fla., available at https://irp.fas.org/ops/ci/al-arian_indict_022003.pdf.

⁵ Press Release, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Sami Al-Arian Sentenced To 57 Months In Prison For Assisting Terrorist Group (May 1, 2006), https://www.justice.gov/archive/opa/pr/2006/May/06_crm_260.html.

⁶ Raja Abdulrahim, *Islamic Jihad, the Group Israel Blamed for the Hospital Blast, Is an Armed Group Often Aligned with Hamas*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 17, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/17/world/middleeast/islamic-jihad-gaza-hospital-israel.html>.

⁷ See *supra* n.4 ¶ 2.

⁸ *Id.* ¶ 3.

⁹ *Supra*, note 5.

¹⁰ Josh Gerstein, *Al-Arian Saga Ends with Deportation*, POLITICO (Feb. 6, 2015), <https://www.politico.com/blogs/under-the-radar/2015/02/al-arian-saga-ends-with-deportation-202233>.

¹¹ Rep. Josh Gottheimer, *RELEASE: Gottheimer Speaks at Rutgers Hillel to Combat Rising Antisemitism on Campus & Across New Jersey Stresses Importance for U.S.-Israel Relationship* (Dec. 14, 2021), <https://gottheimer.house.gov/posts/release-gottheimer-speaks-at-rutgers-hillel-to-combat-rising-antisemitism-on-campus-across-new-jersey-stresses-importance-for-us-israel-relationship>.

¹² Larry Yudelton, *Official response — 'weak and pathetic,'* JEWISH STD. (Sep. 29, 2021), <https://jewishstandard.timesofisrael.com/official-response-weak-and-pathetic/>.

¹³ *Psychoanalysis Under Occupation: Practicing Resistance in Palestine*, RUTGERS CTS. FOR SEC., RACE AND RIGHTS, <https://csrr.rutgers.edu/psychoanalysis-under-occupation-practicing-resistance-in-palestineoctober-10-20231200pm-est/> (last accessed Jan. 10, 2024).

¹⁴ *Id.*

the Center posted on X stating: “To assess Hamas’s October 7th operation and the Israeli regime’s subsequent response in isolation is to ignore over 75 years of colonial violence and the horrific consequences born out of these decades of oppression and attempted erasure.”¹⁵

As an additional example, on December 4, 2023, the Center hosted an event titled “*The West, Israel and Settler Colonization of Palestine*” with Professor Joseph Massad—a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Center.¹⁶ In an October 8, 2023 article, Prof. Massad lauded the October 7th massacre in “jubilant” terms.¹⁷ According to Prof. Massad, “[t]he sight of the Palestinian resistance fighters storming Israeli checkpoints separating Gaza from Israel was astounding.”¹⁸ He goes on: “[n]o less awesome were the scenes witnessed by millions of jubilant Arabs who spent the day watching the news...” and “[n]o less striking was the capture of some of Israel’s colonial soldiers and officers in their underwear while sleeping.”¹⁹

These appeals to violence are not isolated. Faculty affiliate of the Center Hatem Bazian, also a speaker at the above-referenced 9/11 event, retweeted a Jewish caricature of a man with locks and traditional dress proclaiming “Mom, look! I is chosen! I can now kill, rape, smuggle organs & steal the land of Palestinians. Yay! #Ashke-Nazi.”²⁰ Mr. Bazian is also a founder of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and American Muslims for Palestine (AMP).²¹ He remains Chairman of AMP’s board,²² which is being sued in federal court in Chicago²³ and investigated by the Virginia Attorney General²⁴ for alleged financial ties to Hamas. Mr. Bazian has publicly called for an Intifada in the United States.²⁵

The Center’s Director, Prof. Sahar Aziz, signed an open letter on May 29, 2021, that read: “[w]e are in awe of the Palestinian struggle to resist violent occupation, removal, erasure, and the

¹⁵ Center for Security, Race and Rights (@RUCSRR), TWITTER (Oct. 31, 2023, 11:01 AM), <https://twitter.com/RUCSRR/status/1719369039066148868> (hyperlinks to <https://t.co/hk08EcgiJP>).

¹⁶ Rutgers Center for Security, Race & Rights, *The West, Israel and Settler Colonization of Palestine with Professor Prof. Joseph Massad*, YOUTUBE (Dec. 4, 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UexBaAmEtj4>.

¹⁷ Joseph Massad, *Just Another Battle or the Palestinian War of Liberation?* THE ELEC. INTIFADA (Oct. 8, 2023), <https://electronicintifada.net/content/just-another-battle-or-palestinian-war-liberation/38661>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Ron Hughes رونا هيووز @wherepond, TWITTER (July 31, 2017, 1:49 PM), <https://twitter.com/wherepond/status/892079717880344577> (original tweet); <https://twitter.com/wherepond/status/892079717880344577/retweets> (list of retweets).

²¹ *About*, HATEM BAZIAN, <http://www.hatembazian.com/about/> (“Dr. Bazian is founder and national Chair of American Muslims for Palestine.”); Alan Blinder, *Inside the Pro-Palestinian Group Protesting Across College Campuses*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 17, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/17/us/students-justice-palestine-campus-protests.html> (“One of the people who founded [AMP] about 30 years ago, Hatem Bazian.”).

²² *Our Team*, AM. MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE, <https://www.ampalestine.org/about-amp/our-team>.

²³ *Boim v. Am. Muslims for Palestine et al.*, 17-cv-3591 (N.D. Ill.); Chuck Goudie, et al. *Family’s fight against Hamas targets local pro-Palestinian nonprofit*, ABC7 CHICAGO (Nov. 1, 2023), <https://abc7chicago.com/hamas-david-boim-terrorism-american-muslims-for-palestine/14001029/>.

²⁴ Haley Cohen, *Virginia’s attorney general launches investigation into pro-Hamas campus group*, JEWISH INSIDER (Oct. 31, 2023), <https://jewishinsider.com/2023/10/virginias-attorney-general-launches-investigation-into-pro-hamas-campus-group/>.

²⁵ Michael Starr, *September 11 Event to Feature Speakers Affiliated with Terrorists*, JERUSALEM POST (Sep. 11, 2021) <https://www.jpost.com/international/israelic-terrorism/september-11-event-to-feature-speakers-affiliated-with-terrorists-679147>.

expansion of Israeli settler colonialism.”²⁶ Prof. Aziz also reposts propaganda on X, including the following: “Turns out there no rapes or ‘beheaded babies’! Israel & its MSM accomplices are making up so many outrageous lies to distract from its carnage in Gaza!”²⁷ According to the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ, Prof. Aziz has “regularly and consistently promoted vile antisemitic propaganda.”²⁸ Despite her track record of promoting vile, anti-Semitic propaganda, the Center affords Prof. Aziz the opportunity to train law students through a formal law fellows program, the cornerstone of which is “one-to-one mentorship” with her.²⁹ According to testimonials of the Law Fellows, they are “direct[ed]” by Prof. Aziz in their “research, education, and activism.”³⁰

The work of the Center, its promotion of terrorist sympathizers, and its platforming of radical ideologues is troubling to us as members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The Committee has a long history of working on legislation meant to root out support for terrorism, and to compensate its victims. For example, in 2016 Congress passed the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA), Pub. L. No. 111-222, which expanded civil liability under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-132, to encompass acts such as aiding and abetting. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 2333(d)(2). As we explore the efficacy of this legislation, particularly in the context of recent world events, it is appropriate to evaluate the organizational and financial backing of groups that seek to legitimize violence and provide platforms for terrorist sympathizers.

To assist us in this important work, please answer the following questions no later than 5 p.m. on February 20, 2024. We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

1. Is the Center now, or has the Center previously been, supported by federal funds, either directly or indirectly? For purposes of this question, support includes but is not limited to the provision of funds for staff compensation; the provision of funds for office space, IT support, or other administrative services; the provision of funds to compensate speakers or presenters; the provision of funds to co-sponsor events; and the provision of funds to host events. For purposes of this question, the indirect provision of funds includes but is not limited to the Center receiving funds provided to it by any Rutgers-affiliated entity or any other legal entity that receives funds directly or indirectly from the federal government.

²⁶ Open Letter from Various Rutgers Faculty, *We Stand in Solidarity with the Palestinian People*, <https://csrr.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/solidarity-with-palestinians.pdf>.

²⁷ Editorial, *It’s Time for Sahar Aziz to Resign*, WESTFIELD LEADERS & UNION COUNTY HAWK (Oct. 11, 2023), <https://www.goleader.com/2023/10/11/time-sahar-aziz-resign/>.

²⁸ Dov Ben-Shimon, *Rutgers University / Call to Action*, JEWISH FED. OF GREATER METROWEST NJ, <https://www.jfedgmw.org/rutgers-university-call-to-action/> (last accessed Jan. 10, 2024).

²⁹ *Testimonials From Our Fellows*, RUTGERS CTS. FOR SEC., RACE AND RIGHTS, <https://csrr.rutgers.edu/testimonials-from-our-fellows/> (last accessed Jan. 10, 2024).

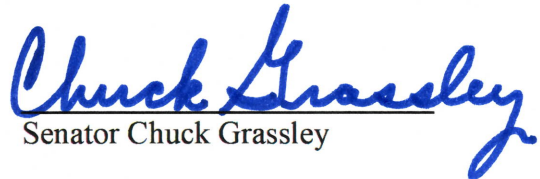
³⁰ *Id.*

- a. If your answer to Question 1 is yes, please identify the avenues through which federal funding has supported the work of the Center.
2. Is the Center now, or has the Center previously been, supported by New Jersey taxpayer funds, either directly or indirectly? For purposes of this question, support includes but is not limited to the provision of funds for staff compensation; the provisions of funds for office space, IT support, or other administrative services; the provision of funds to compensate speakers or presenters; the provision of funds to co-sponsor events; and the provision of funds to host events. For purposes of this question, the indirect provision of funds includes but is not limited to the Center receiving funds provided to it by any Rutgers-affiliated entity or any other legal entity that receives funds directly or indirectly from the New Jersey public fisc.
 - a. If your answer to Question 2 is yes, please identify the avenues through which state funding has supported the work of the Center.
3. Does the Center now, or has the Center ever, received funds from any foreign government, either directly or indirectly? For purposes of this question, the indirect provision of funds includes but is not limited to the Center receiving funds provided to it by any Rutgers-affiliated entity or any other legal entity that receives funds directly or indirectly from a foreign government.
 - a. If your answer to Question 3 is yes, please identify the foreign governments and the amount of funds.
4. What is the annual budget of the Center?
5. Prior to receipt of this letter, were you as individuals aware that the Center co-sponsored a controversial event on September 11, 2021?
 - a. If your answer to Question 5 is yes, when did you first become aware of the event titled "*Whose Narrative? 20 Years since September 11, 2001*"?
 - b. If your answer to Question 5 is yes, when, if at all, did you become aware that Sami Al-Arian was featured at the event?
 - c. If your answer to Question 5 is yes, what was your reaction when hearing of the event?
6. Prior to this letter, were you as individuals aware that Prof. Aziz has been accused of conduct in the nature of promoting anti-Semitism and/or anti-Semitic propaganda?
 - a. If your answer to Question 6 is yes, what was your reaction when hearing any such accusation of Prof. Aziz's conduct?
7. Prior to this letter, were you aware of any events hosted by the Center, or public statements made by its affiliates, which spoke favorably of the violent atrocities of October 7, 2023?
8. In light of the above-listed activities of the Center, the innumerable similar events sponsored or hosted by the Center, and the personal statements of Prof. Aziz and other

affiliates of the Center, does Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, support the continued existence of the Center under the leadership of Ms. Aziz?

Sincerely,



Ranking Member Lindsey Graham


Senator Chuck Grassley



Senator John Cornyn


Senator Mike Lee


Senator Ted Cruz


Senator Josh Hawley


Senator Tom Cotton


Senator John Kennedy


Senator Thom Tillis


Senator Marsha Blackburn