

to the President and Provost's Statement about the Removal of the Palestinian Flag on Campus

On the morning of October 16, President Laura Walker and Provost Maurice Hall sent out a campus-wide email announcement about the removal of the Palestinian flag from the Commons balcony. This flag had been placed on September 28 by a group of student(s) showing solidarity with the Palestinian cause, way in advance of any escalation in the region. The flag's presence on the Commons terrace in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks became even more significant to make sure the media coverage of the violence committed by the Israeli military and the Hamas militants does not make us lose sight of the real cause: the Palestinian bodies who have been "colonized, besieged, assaulted, and imprisoned for decades", as our Faculty/Staff allies put it. The Palestinian flag does not represent the cause of Hamas (**a militant organization with its own flag**), it represents the resilience, statehood and freedom of the Palestinian people.

By conflating the flag of Hamas with the flag of Palestine, **the Senior Leadership of Bennington College is endorsing the same rhetoric that has been used by the Netanyahu government to justify the genocide of the Palestinian people.** The claim that a flag that shows resilience against colonization is triggering to certain students is sending a dangerous message to all community members with a decolonial commitment: Bennington College's anti-racist and progressive values are applied only to causes that serve the aims of the U.S. Empire.

Apart from this, it also means that **the Senior Leadership of Bennington does not have any regard for a campus democracy or a Shared Governance Process.** An autocratic takedown of the flag effectively overrules the Shared Governance Process by not having approached the Student Council or any other affinity groups for whom this removal was going to have dangerous consequences. The President and the Provost's unilateral decision to take down the flag made it clear that power at Bennington College rests not in the hands of a democratic community, but in the seats of the President and the Provost. The continuous meetings by senior administration with the Student Council without Laura Walker also revealed their lack of capability to take action without the President's approval.

Bennington was founded in the name of values that are very different from the ones being practiced by the Senior Administration today. The Bennington Commencement states: "Student freedom is not the absence of restraint, however; it is rather the fullest possible substitution of habits of self-restraint for restraint imposed by others." In unilaterally taking down a symbol of a colonized people's identity and statehood, Bennington College is showing a complete reversal of this statement: substituting the restraint imposed by a repressive administration for an exercise of civic responsibility and democratic citizenship.

The student organizations signing this statement stand in solidarity with and are grateful to the Faculty and Staff Members who have already issued a statement in response to this action. **As students we cannot and will not stand idly while censorship and repression occurs on our own campus, at the hands of our own administrative "leaders".** For student organizations who want to sign on to this effort, please email any of the organizations undersigned.

Signed by:

Muslim Student Association
Latine Student Association
South Asian Student Association
International Student Task Force
GANAS



A Faculty and Staff Response to the President and Provost's Statement about the Removal of the Palestinian Flag on Campus

As the faculty and staff members undersigned, we are deeply concerned about the removal of the Palestinian flag that was hung on the balcony of the Commons building, followed by the email that was sent to the community from the most powerful seats of the College. The decision to remove the Palestinian flag is not representative of the community. It is repressive, and we do not support this act of silencing voices in solidarity with Palestine on campus and in the world. We will not take part in ranking one people's pain and trauma against another, condemning violence only against certain bodies while implicitly endorsing campaigns of violence against bodies who have been colonized, besieged, assaulted, and imprisoned for decades.

A Palestinian flag is not a symbol of hatred; it is a symbol of statehood. Accepting the rationale that the mere presence of a Palestinian flag is triggering reinforces the dangerous conflation of Palestine and Hamas—the same conflation that is being used to justify the expansion of the current conflict. In the context of ongoing genocidal rhetoric, policies, and campaigns against the Palestinian people, we believe the unilateral decision to remove the flag sends a dangerous message to the Bennington community.

If Bennington College prides itself on becoming a decolonial and anti-racist educational institution, we ask:

1. How does removing the Palestinian flag *affirm the intersecting identities of **all** its community members*? Why does Bennington College's commitment to anti-racism stop at the militarized border of the US?
2. What does the act of removing the flag say about Bennington College? Why has the college opted to model censorship, bias, and a lack of transparency, rather than asking why the flag was there to begin with—and using this as an opportunity to facilitate conversations in our community?

We see a disturbing irony in the College's continuing to practice land acknowledgments while censoring a symbol of a colonized people's identity and statehood. This act reveals a serious lack of understanding of the processes of colonization and undermines the College's claim of commitment to anti-racist education.

We want to make clear—especially to SWANA and Muslim members of our community—that the actions of the administration are not representative of the whole faculty.

(If you want to be added to the list of the faculty/staff who signed this letter, please reach out to your faculty colleagues who have already signed the letter.)



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