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The Peace and Justice Studies Association

Creating a more just and peaceful world...through research, education, and action.

Dr. John Ettlting

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Dr. Jake Liszka

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Dr. Andrew Buckser

Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences

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Dear President Ettlting, Provost Liszka, and Dean Buckser:

We write on behalf of the Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA, www.peacejusticestudies.org) to express our grave concern about the campaign of harassment being waged against Simona Sharoni, professor of Gender and Women's Studies at SUNY Plattsburgh and a member of PJSA, which threatens her safety and well-being as well as her free speech and academic freedom rights. This campaign, which now includes a request under New York State's Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) that SUNY Plattsburgh make available records relating to Professor Sharoni's hiring, employment and academic activities, appears intended to intimidate and ultimately silence her because of her public support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. We call upon the university to exercise its responsibility to protect Professor Sharoni's right of free speech and to defend her academic freedom.

Following an interview conducted on March 5, 2016, in which Professor Sharoni expressed her support of the BDS movement, an inflammatory campaign of tweets and email messages was launched against her, including threats to her physical safety. On April 28, 2016, Professor Sharoni contacted a number of university leaders, including SUNY Plattsburgh's president and provost, the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the chair of the Faculty Senate and officers of the faculty union to inform them about these threats and to ask that the university publicly affirm its commitment to academic freedom and to the protection of the safety and well-being of all its students and employees. Dr. Sharoni has indicated to PJSA that these threats, and the university's failure to issue a statement in support of her academic freedom, have rendered it difficult for her to pursue scholarship on these contentious issues.

PJSA is dedicated to bringing together academics, K-12 teachers, and grassroots activists to explore alternatives to violence and share visions and strategies for peacebuilding, social justice, and social change. Like a growing number of academic associations, PJSA has officially endorsed the BDS movement. We wholeheartedly support Professor Sharoni in her work and scholarship. Unfortunately Professor Sharoni is not the only member of our association or other academic association who has been targeted for their work for Palestinian human rights. There is a climate of hostility in the U.S. academy today that threatens many scholars working on Israel-Palestine. This only makes our commitments to academic freedom all the more critical

PJSA · (housed at Georgetown University)

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It appears to us that these FOIL requests are part of the continuing campaign to harass and intimidate Dr. Sharoni because she has expressed certain political views. We believe that everyone should be free to express their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as on any other issue of public concern without fear of harassment, intimidation or sanction. We also believe that SUNY Plattsburgh has a clear responsibility to defend Professor Sharoni and all of its other employees from threat and intimidation, in keeping with the constitutionally protected right of free speech and with the principles of academic freedom.

We believe strongly that attacks on academic freedom in any country, including the United States, must not be allowed to stand. Dr. Sharoni's academic freedom has been compromised in this instance. We therefore urge you to support her by issuing a public statement condemning threats against her and stating her right to conduct research and public engagement on these issues in an environment free from fear. We also urge you to consider carefully which documents are exempt from FOIL requests and to weigh seriously the interests of academic freedom against the interests of the requesters, in particular in cases such as this, when the goal seems to be only intimidation. We call on SUNY Plattsburgh's leadership to publicly and vigorously affirm its commitment to the principles of free speech and academic freedom as well as its intention to defend Professor Sharoni and other faculty members against harassment and threats by politically motivated individuals and groups based outside the university community.

If you have any questions about this statement or PJSA's support of academic freedom, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Dr. Laura Finley
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Associate Professor, Barry University

Dr. Edmund Pries
Co-Chair, Peace and Justice Studies Association Board
Assistant Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

Dr. Michael Loadenthal
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