February 5, 2024

Brian Nelson
Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Under Secretary Nelson,

We are writing to urge you to marshal U.S. Department of Treasury’s policy, enforcement, regulatory, and intelligence functions and to work in coordination with the Department of Justice and the Department of Education to investigate American colleges and universities that illegally withheld and failed to report information to the Department of Education on approximately $13 billion in undisclosed contributions from foreign regimes, many of which are authoritarian, and to determine whether any of the donors contributed to the funding of antisemitic protest groups on our college and university campuses.

If authoritarian regimes or their proxy Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) are providing financial support to antisemitic protest groups at our academic institutions, these practices could implicate violations of federal antiterrorism law, anti-money laundering law, and higher education law. It is imperative that we understand whether these organizations are operating as part of a broader international network that could implicate state sponsors of terrorism or other nefarious actors.

A report recently published by the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) indicates that, “a massive influx of foreign, concealed donations to American institutions of higher learning, much of it from authoritarian regimes with notable support from Middle Eastern sources, reflects or supports heightened levels of intolerance towards Jews, open inquiry and free expression.”

The NCRI report found that:

- From 2015–2020, institutions that accepted money from Middle Eastern donors had, on average, 300 percent more antisemitic incidents than those institutions that did not.

- From 2015–2020, institutions that accepted undisclosed funds from authoritarian donors had, on average, 250 percent more antisemitic incidents than those institutions that did not.

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• In addition, campuses that accept undisclosed money are on average ~85 percent more likely to see campaigns “targeting academic scholars for sanction, including campaigns to investigate, censor, demote, suspend, or terminate.”

It is necessary to determine whether there are financial connections between those making large donations to our institutions of higher learning and the funding of antisemitic protests on campuses across the country.

Since Hamas’s brutal attacks against Israel on October 7, we have witnessed an alarming increase in the rate of religious hostilities, including a 388 percent increase in domestic incidents of antisemitism. These incidents have been particularly prevalent at universities, where students have been assaulted, had their places of worship vandalized, and faced discrimination and harassment from faculty and staff. Faith based violence and all other forms of bigotry run contrary to everything we stand for as a nation. Hatred and intolerance did not become a feature of institutions of higher education by accident. Their rise is the direct result of long-standing campaigns of hatred to demonize minority groups on campus. While the impact of these groups on students is clear, their sources of funding remain largely unknown.

There is a well-documented history of FTOs operating within American borders under the guise of “independent human rights groups.” For example, in 2001, the Department of Justice (DOJ) dismantled the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development after it was discovered they had provided material assistance to Hamas. We also know that staff members for the Islamic Association for Palestine — a major propaganda arm for Hamas — formed the American Muslims for Palestine, a group that has been instrumental in the founding of antisemitic campus organizations. In addition, the Chinese government funneled funds to a student organization, serving as a way for the Chinese government to maintain a grip on American campuses.

We are deeply concerned that we have seen a resurgence of these malicious practices today. Given global campaigns to incite violence, there is reason to believe that terrorist groups may be funding antisemitic protest groups at our academic institutions. We urge the Department of Treasury to coordinate efforts with the Department of Justice and the Department of Education to thoroughly investigate the sources of funding to our colleges and universities and to determine whether these groups are funding antisemitic organizations and protests on campuses across the country.

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Thank you for your immediate attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Don Bacon
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

CC:
Janet Yellen, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Andrea Gacki, Director, Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Bradley Smith, Director, Office of Foreign Assets Control, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Elizabeth Rosenberg, Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, U.S. Department of the Treasury
Merrick Garland, Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice
Matthew Olsen, Assistant Attorney General for National Security, U.S. Department of Justice
Miguel Cardona, Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education