



For Immediate Release:

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**Coalition for Justice in Palestine
Statement on University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee Agreement with
UWM Popular University for Palestine**

**Press Conference: Thursday, May 24, 3pm
On Kenwood Avenue, in front of UWM's Mitchell Hall
Inclement weather:**

Islamic Society of Milwaukee, University Center, 2223 E Kenwood Avenue

The Wisconsin Coalition for Justice in Palestine, representing 64 member organizations, stands by the agreement negotiated by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee administration with the students represented in the UWM Popular University for Palestine on May 14, 2024. We castigate the harsh [critiques](#) levied by UW system [President Jay Rothman](#) and the [joint statement](#) released by Milwaukee Hillel, the Milwaukee Jewish Federation and, notably, the powerful Anti Defamation League (ADL). Both of these statements emerge from false narratives of the encampment as well as the nature of the university.

Fresh from a career in the corporate law offices of [Foley and Lardner](#), Mr. Rothman became the ninth president of the UW System in 2022. This professional background ill equips him to oversee vital university practices of diversity, academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression so essential to university life. Unfortunately, his ineptitude with these concepts is manifest in the statement released by the UW System on the UWM agreements on May 15.

The statement asserts that “(M)aintaining viewpoint neutrality on challenging public issues is critically important, especially in situations where students and other university stakeholders on multiple sides of an issue are in vehement disagreement.” In fact, “viewpoint neutrality” is the opposite of what should go on at a nationally ranked campus like UWM. As UW President Charles Kendall Adams said in defense of controversial socialist professor Richard Ely in 1894: “Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.”

“Sifting and winnowing” aptly describes the process by which Chancellor Mone and his team negotiated with the student organizers from the UWM Popular University for Palestine. There were long conversations between parties with quite different viewpoints that ultimately informed the agreement. It is inappropriate and despotic for a sitting UW system president to intervene on grounds of some illusory and incorrect “neutrality.”

Instead of criticizing the UWM administration for not using violent force against their own students, including many students of color, President Rothman should be fretting about the fact that so few students of color attend the schools in the UW system. In 2023, he collaborated with extremists in the state legislature by agreeing to cut Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs across the system. The flagship campus, UW Madison has less than 5% students of color.

It is noteworthy that the [Milwaukee Jewish Federation](#) and [Milwaukee Hillel](#) included the [Anti Defamation League](#) as a signatory to their statement against the agreement, because the statement adheres to longstanding ADL practices of smearing progressive organizing. Without any evidence or detail, the statement makes the serious allegations that the encamped students “vandalized university property, and used harassment and intimidation to fuel antisemitism on campus.” While participants in the encampment engaged in chalk graffiti, much of it washed away with the spring rains. The remaining slogans and artwork were easily erased within a day by UWM facilities staff.

Regrettably, neither the statement nor the associated organizations have provided any sources or detail on the grave charges of “harassment and intimidation” against Jewish students, other than the fact that some slogans, such as “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” that may or may not make some Jewish students

uncomfortable. There is no evidence that the Gaza solidarity encampment at UWM, which included Jewish students as well as two Jewish-led Shabbat services, perpetrated any acts of antisemitism.

The strategy of making accusations of campus antisemitism first and documenting them later or never is widespread, as distinguished UCLA historian Robin D.G. Kelley has [pointed out](#). Despite polls [verifying](#) that 94% of Jewish college students have never been excluded from anything on campus because of their identity, the ADL and its affiliated organizations perpetrate the mythical embattlement of Jewish students on campus as a method of silencing Palestine solidarity and/or any criticism of racist Israeli policies.

Taken together, Rothman's statement and that of the ADL, Milwaukee Hillel, and the Milwaukee Jewish Federation evidence the eruption of a new McCarthyism on campus. Despite the real and growing risk of antisemitism from white nationalists, the new McCarthyism invokes false allegations of antisemitism to shut down the legitimate claims and gains of Palestine solidarity activism on campus.

We call upon the Governor and the Board of Regents to remove President Rothman. Presidents of universities need to be educators who can model patient discussions and are willing to take a moral stand on issues disproportionately affecting students of color.

The UW system needs leaders who are not pressured by organizations promoting the interests of a foreign government, leaders unafraid to stand up to the false narratives that are racist and supremacist. The voices of compassionate and conscientious students who bravely stand against the current genocide in Gaza must not be silenced. The UW system must protect these students from corporate lawyers who seek to silence their humanity using punitive measures as solutions, and listen to their exemplary humanitarian concerns.