Fact sheet on President Trump's December 11, 2019 Executive Order (EO)
TrumpExecutiveOrder

What does the executive order do?
- It adopts a controversial redefinition of antisemitism from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an organization based in Europe, which labels as possible antisemitism many common criticisms of Israeli policy and the nature of the Jewish state. Among those denouncing this redefinition's weaponization to suppress constitutionally protected political speech has been its original author, Kenneth Stern, director of the Center for the Study of Hate at Bard College.
- It instructs government agencies to refer to the IHRA's list of "Contemporary Examples of Anti-Semitism," which includes "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor." By linking these two elements, the EO adopts the position that analysis of Israeli state policy is in itself antisemitic.
- It invites complaints to the Department of Education over educational institutions' failure to stop alleged antisemitism and threatens to withhold federal funding if it sustains the complaints and suppressive action is not taken.

What effects does the EO have?
- The EO attempts to circumvent democratic process to unilaterally designate certain forms of political speech off-limits.
- The EO weaponizes false accusations of antisemitism to suppress speech in support of Palestinian rights, Palestinian history and self-determination, and criticisms of Israeli policy and violence.
- The EO heightens anxiety about being labeled anti-Semitic because of Palestine solidarity activity on and beyond U.S. campuses.
- The EO has already led to increased harassment of faculty who teach courses on Palestine/Israel, Middle East studies, social movements, colonialism, violence, gender politics, indigenous studies and numerous other related courses. This harassment is particularly worrisome for junior faculty who do not yet have security of employment.
- The EO suppresses – via intimidation tactics – teaching, research, and public events about Palestine/Israel.
- The EO fails to defend Jewish students against truly antisemitic acts. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act has already been deemed to cover antisemitism. The EO is silent about actual instances of antisemitism and white supremacy.

What is the context of this EO?
- This EO is only the latest in a long series of tactics of harassment and repression that attempt to silence any and all criticism of Israel, from photocopied "Black Books" of faculty in the 1980s to online sites such as Canary Mission and Campus Watch.
- This EO fuels and supports efforts by the Lawfare Project and other Israel-aligned groups to sue universities. These legal cases have never held up in court. Their goal, as their initiators state, is not to win in court but to intimidate and silence.
- Advocates for Palestinian rights on campuses have reported hundreds of cases in which they have been subjected to undue scrutiny, censorship, restrictions on their work and even penalties.
- Palestinian students and faculty have experienced vicious online harassment campaigns and efforts to destroy their academic or future careers via doxing or calling directly on their administrators to take action against them.

What can you do?

- Share this information with colleagues and administrators.
- Build support networks among faculty allies.
- Be alert to attempts by administrators or colleagues to quietly squelch academic programs, courses, speakers or activities that address the Palestine/Israel conflict.
- Remind administrators and colleagues that education and scholarship at the university is and should be a site of debate.
- Call on administrators to publicly assert their support for the principles of academic freedom, including the freedom of the university from government interference in its educational and scholarly aims.
- Call on administrators to reject this EO and the Trump administration's strategies of fear and intimidation.