



NWSA Statement in Support of Angela Davis

January 14, 2019

The Executive Committee of the National Women's Studies Association is appalled and stunned by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute's recent decision to rescind the Fred Shuttlesworth Civil Rights Award from long-time activist Angela Davis. For over half a century Professor Davis has been a crucial voice for civil and human rights struggles worldwide.

The BCRI's decision speaks to the particular risk Black internationalist justice activists face when they take principled but controversial political positions, especially related to Palestine. As Professor Davis says in her statement, "The rescinding of this invitation and the cancellation of the event where I was scheduled to speak was thus not primarily an attack against me but rather against the very spirit of the indivisibility of justice." We completely agree.

In light of this unfortunate decision, we reiterate our shared conviction that criticism of Israel does not equate to anti-Semitism. Criticism of Israel's policies crosses racial, ethnic, religious, and gender boundaries. Principled people around the world, including many Jewish scholars, activists, and organizations – Howard Zinn, Melanie Kaye Kantrowitz, Elly Bulkin, Herbert Marcuse, Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, and many others – have also voiced opposition to the inhumane and unjust treatment of Palestinians. Like Professor Davis, we affirm our commitment to Palestinian human rights while continuing to speak out and work against the forces of anti-Semitism.

Professor Davis' opposition to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and routine violation of human rights abuses is part of her long-standing transnational, intersectional feminist activism and commitment to stand firm against injustices across the globe. Her assertion that "human rights are indivisible" suggests that we cannot compartmentalize our social justice work. She is a world citizen which means she sees connections between mass incarceration in the U.S. and Israel's surveillance, harassment, and detainment of people in Gaza; connections between anti-Semitism and racism; and between violence against women in the U.S. and across the globe.

We are witnessing an all too familiar example of political silencing reminiscent of McCarthyism, where a woman who has been fighting for peace and justice for most of her life can be stripped of an award and have her commitment to human rights questioned because a vocal minority disagrees with her. The decision to rescind the award disregards her decades of principled scholarship, teaching, and activism. It is a dangerous example of political policing. Professor Davis' nuanced and sophisticated scholarship helps us move beyond monolithic political perspectives – and makes clear that it is possible to criticize the policies of the state of Israel and simultaneously support Jewish and Palestinian people.

As feminist scholars we see this refusal to honor Professor Davis as not only an insult to her and to all that she stands for, but an affront to all people who support freedom of speech and social justice. We urge the BCRI to act swiftly to present Professor Davis with the honor she deserves.

SIGNED by the NWSA Executive Committee with affiliations*

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