

Via Email

June 12, 2014

Samer Khalaf
President, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
President@adc.org

Dear Mr. Khalaf,

We write in anticipation of ADC's upcoming impending National Convention. We have agreed to present a panel focusing on Palestinian rights activism on college campuses, and the repression that such activism faces. However, we feel it is our obligation – as Arab-Americans, as human rights activists, and as civil rights lawyers – to raise our concerns about the sexual harassment scandal at the ADC, and the way that ADC has approached it. A part of our panel will be dedicated to discussing the importance of this issue, and how we approach gender and power dynamics in our activist and legal work.

The sexual harassment allegations were very serious, and should have been a time for ADC to confront the issue and show leadership in ensuring a safe and accepting environment both within the organization and in the community more broadly. Rather, ADC appears to have known about allegations against Imad Hammad for years and did not take appropriate action. Instead, ADC denied the allegations and publicly shamed the women who came forward with their accounts of sexual assault and harassment, and declared that the results of an independent investigation into the matter provided “insufficient evidence” to take action.

Sexual harassment, violence and gender inequality is still a pervasive problem in our communities. Women frequently feel that they do not have community backing or support networks to help them deal with this issue. This incident was a sad demonstration of such inadequacies and only helped to reinforce the silence and acceptance of gender based harassment and discrimination in our communities.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that ADC, as an organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of Arab-Americans, confront the issue of sexual harassment with at least as much conviction as it does other civil rights issues faced by the Arab-American community. It must seriously investigate all reports of sexual harassment and gender discrimination. It must recognize the history of victim-blaming that pervades sexual harassment cases. It must work to educate the community about the issue of sexual harassment, and adopt best practices in confronting it, both internally and in the community. Most importantly, ADC must ensure that these practices are implemented through structures that focus on prevention and holding perpetrators accountable. This takes a great deal of work, especially when culturally specific approaches are necessary, and when they must address the simultaneous issues of racism and sexism that the community faces and struggles with.

That is how ADC can begin to rebuild the community's trust that was so thoroughly shattered by this scandal, and begin to show leadership about how others must deal with such issues.

Your June 11, 2014 letter was a long overdue apology and acknowledgment of ADC's destructive role in compounding the suffering that the women who came forward experienced. We are encouraged to see that the ADC plans to work on educational programming relating to sexual harassment, including at the Convention.

Unfortunately, this will not undo what has been done, and it will not make whole the many women who were victimized by Imad Hammad, and doubly hurt by ADC's inaction and insensitivity. We therefore urge you to revisit the demands made by community members and address them in good faith and with full honesty and vigor. We also urge continued open and transparent discussion of this issue both within the organization and in the Arab-American community at large. It is only with such exposure that we can collectively prevent and adequately confront such behavior, and the gender and power relationships that accompany it.

We believe ADC can and must play an important role in the Arab-American community on this issue, but to do so, it must fully come to terms with this damaging episode and be fully transparent about its past and current efforts to overcome it.

Sincerely,

Dima Khalidi, Director, Palestine Solidarity Legal Support

Gabriella Kaiyal-Smith, DMV Students for Justice in Palestine

Lena Ibrahim, DMV Students for Justice in Palestine

Tareq Radi, George Mason University Students Against Israeli Apartheid

Radhika Sainath, Staff Attorney, Palestine Solidarity Legal Support