

October 28, 2020

Dr. Andrew Hamilton
President
Office of the President
New York University
70 Washington, South Square
New York, NY 10012
Andrew.Hamilton@nyu.edu
SENT VIA EMAIL

Re: Zoom

Dear President Hamilton:

The American Association of University Professors is deeply concerned about the implications for academic freedom of the unilateral decision by Zoom to cancel a webinar hosted by the NYU chapter of the AAUP, and co-sponsored by several NYU departments and institutes, owing, it seems, to the participation of a Palestinian activist accused of terrorist activity. It is, of course, both ironic and sad that the event was organized to protest Zoom's previous censorship of a webinar at San Francisco State University.

We understand that this action was taken without the prior knowledge of your administration. However, we join with our chapter in calling on you to issue a strong statement denouncing this action as a violation of academic freedom and urge you to consider ways in which NYU's contract with Zoom and other similar providers can be renegotiated so as to better protect the rights of faculty and students to engage with controversial ideas.

Zoom contends that it is "committed to supporting the open exchange of ideas and conversations." However, it has offered no justification for its action other than to state without specifics that on the basis of information it received from an outside group the company determined that the event violated one of its policies. As the National Coalition Against Censorship stated in response to the previous incident, "no court has ruled that merely allowing a member of a terrorist group to participate in an academic forum constitutes support of terrorism. If support for free speech means anything, it means allowing unpopular people to speak, unless it is clear that their speech is unprotected."

San Francisco State President Lynn Mahoney [responded](#) to the previous cancellation appropriately, declaring that her university "remains steadfast in its support of the right of faculty to conduct their teaching and scholarship free from censorship." She emphasized that the panel discussion did not violate Zoom's terms of service or the law. "We cannot embrace the silencing of controversial views, even if they are hurtful to others," she added. "We must commit to speech and to the right to dissent."

We hope that NYU will issue a similarly strong statement and that you will reach out to other college and university presidents and work with them to ensure that Zoom and other private providers cannot exert veto power over legitimate university activities and classes in violation of academic freedom.


October 28, 2020

Page 2 of 2

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Irene Mulvey".

Irene Mulvey
President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry Reichman".

Henry Reichman
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure

Cc: Rebecca Karl, NYU-AAUP Chapter
Mary Rose Kubal, President, New York State Conference of the AAUP
Dr. Katherine Fleming, Provost, New York University