

April 11, 2024

Dear President Folt, Chairwoman Johnson and members of the Board of Trustees, Provost Guzman, and Dean Soni:

We are writing to express our grave concern about the selection of Asna Tabassum as USC Valedictorian for the class of 2024. While Ms. Tabassum may have demonstrated exemplary academic achievements and service, we believe her selection is indisputably inappropriate.

The role of valedictorian at USC carries significant symbolic weight, representing not only academic excellence but also embodying the broader values of the university community. We would hope that the valedictorian selected would be reflective of the University's values, including its commitment to ensuring a campus community where all individuals feel a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, Ms. Tabassum's documented social media posts suggest that she is deeply polarizing and exclusionary, running counter to these values.

The views embraced by Ms. Tabassum are not merely a matter of political discourse or legitimate criticism of Israel; rather, they are unambiguously antisemitic. Online, Ms. Tabassum has referred to Israel, the Jewish homeland, as a "Jewish ethnostate," accused Israel of "ethnic cleansing" Palestinians, and called for "a complete abolishment of the state of Israel." In a since-deleted post, she invoked the antisemitic rallying cry, "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," advocating for the elimination of the Jewish state. Such delegitimization of Israel and denial of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination constitute clear manifestations of antisemitism.

Particularly concerning is the timing of Ms. Tabassum's selection, given the ongoing conflict in the region. In this sensitive moment, as the war perpetrated by the terrorist organization Hamas continues, her selection feels particularly insensitive to the concerns of Jewish and Israeli students and faculty on campus.

While we acknowledge Ms. Tabassum's right to the full expression of her beliefs, we also recognize the University's responsibility to select a valedictorian who can serve as a unifying and inspirational figure for all students. Statements on Ms. Tabassum's profile are egregious, and we urge you to take every measure necessary to ensure that commencement can serve as an unblemished celebration of USC students' achievements.

We were proud to have partnered with USC on the Western Region Summit on Antisemitism in Higher Education, which offered valuable knowledge and tools to support Jewish campus communities confronting increasing levels of antisemitism. We know, President Folt, of your robust commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion to create a safe and affirming climate for all students, including Jewish ones.

In light of the foregoing, the selection of Ms. Tabassum as valedictorian is contrary to your commitment to supporting a thriving campus for all students, including Jewish ones. We

appreciate you working diligently on this and look forward to learning how you will remedy this situation.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Noah Farkas, CEO and President, Jewish Federation Los Angeles

Jeffrey I. Abrams, Regional Director, Anti-Defamation League- Los Angeles

Richard Hirschhaut, Regional Director, American Jewish Committee- Los Angeles

Sarah Hronsky, President Board of Rabbis Southern California

Beth Kean, CEO, Holocaust Museum Los Angeles

Roz Rothstein, CEO, Stand with Us