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November 11, 2026

VIA EMAIL

Ms. Lisa Mariam, Executive Director
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
at George Mason University
4210 Roberts Road
Fairfax, VA 22032-1028

Dear Ms. Mariam:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the oldest pro-Israel organization in the U.S., after being alerted to a biased and hostile-to-Israel course that the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University (OLLI Mason) is offering in the winter of 2027, titled "The History of Palestine." For the reasons detailed below, we urge you to cancel this course without delay. If it is not cancelled, we intend to inform Bernard Osher and the Bernard Osher Foundation, which provide significant financial support to OLLI Mason, that this anti-Israel, antisemitic course is being offered to your members. Mr. Osher and his foundation have a long history of supporting Jewish culture and education and pro-Israel educational initiatives. We anticipate that they will not be pleased to learn that their money is helping to fund a program that will encourage hatred of Israel and Jews at this time of surging antisemitism.

The course's outrageous anti-Israel bias is clear from the course description in your Winter 2027 Catalog:

- Jews are falsely portrayed as "new colonists" in the region that was once called "Palestine." In fact, Jews are indigenous to that land, going back more than 3,700 years. Even after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and forced the Jews out of the region, Jews maintained a continuous presence in their ancestral homeland. The region, which had been called "Judea" – named for the Jews who lived there – was renamed "Palaestina" by the Romans in an effort to minimize its connection to the Jewish people.

- "Palestinians' resistance" is justified when in fact, it is an offensive attempt to sanitize and legitimize Palestinian Arab terrorism and violence against innocent Jews, including shootings, suicide bombings, rocket attacks, stabbings – and, as the world saw on October 7, 2023, the horrific and barbaric murder, rape and mutilation of approximately 1,200 innocent Jewish men, women and children, including babies. Jews endured such violence and terrorism even before the state of Israel was established in 1948; in 1929,

Arabs brutally slaughtered almost 70 innocent Jews and wounded almost 60 more in Hebron, going house to house with clubs, axes and knives. This deliberate targeting of innocent Jewish civilians is abhorrent and morally reprehensible and can never be whitewashed as "resistance."

- "Genocide" in Gaza is referred to as an established fact when in reality, this accusation is a modern-day blood libel against the Jewish people. Genocide is the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national ethnic, racial, or religious group, which was not and never has been Israel's intention as it defended its people against Hamas and its allies in Gaza after the October 7 massacre. Had Israel possessed that intention in Gaza, it would not have taken such extraordinary steps to limit civilian harm during the war, including by texting, making phone calls, and dropping leaflets to warn civilians in advance of attacks. Israel even paused military operations so that civilians could leave combat areas, and cancelled missions because children were nearby.

  John Spencer is a retired U.S. army officer and currently the chair of urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute at West Point. He is recognized internationally as a leading expert on urban warfare and has the credentials and experience to assess the situation in Gaza. Spencer rejects the genocide claim and explains why: "Israel has delivered more humanitarian aid to Gaza than any military in history has provided to an enemy population during wartime." As Spencer notes, over 1.8 million tons of aid have entered the region. Israel has also supplied fuel for hospitals, repaired water pipelines, increased access to clean water, and helped more than 36,000 patients to leave Gaza for treatment abroad. In addition, the IDF has coordinated millions of vaccine doses to Gazans and facilitated the flow of food and medicine. Working with the World Health Organization, Israel ensured that more than 1.1 million Gazan children were vaccinated against polio.

In addition to the serious flaws in the course that are evident from the course description, there is an equally serious problem with the instructor who intends to teach it. Your course catalog advertises that classes are taught by George Mason University professors, experts, and others who are "highly credentialed and experienced instructors." Haitham Arafat, who is identified as the instructor for "The History of Palestine," does not fall into any of these categories. By your own description, he is simply an American Palestinian who was born in Gaza, has family there, and once had a cybersecurity consulting business. He is not a history professor at George Mason University or anywhere else, and there is no evidence that he has the expertise, credentials or experience to teach a course about the history of Palestine.

Your catalog does note that Haitham Arafat recently "sailed in the Global Sumud Flotilla," but that is no testimonial to his ability to teach the course fairly and accurately. In April 2026, the U.S. government publicly condemned the Global Sumud Flotilla as "a pro-Hamas initiative," that was "baseless," "counterproductive," and a "meaningless political stunt" that "has nothing to do with humanitarian aid or the welfare of Gazans." If anything, Mr. Arafat's participation in this flotilla is more evidence that he has no intention of teaching reliable facts and truths to participants in the course. Instead, the intent is plainly to indoctrinate them with his personal political beliefs that are undoubtedly hostile to Israel.

We note that out of the approximately 100 courses in the course catalog, Mr. Arafat's course is the only one that has been marked with a warning: "This course may contain sensitive content." We believe the warning should more accurately reflect that this course may contain content that is false, offensive, and racist against Jews – content that OLLI Mason would never tolerate against any other minority group.

OLLI Mason's catalog touts the "quality educational opportunities" it provides in a "wonderfully warm, welcoming community." It is impossible to imagine that Jewish and Israeli members of OLLI Mason would feel warm or welcome in Mr. Arafat's course.

We understand that we are not the first to complain about this course and that unfortunately, those complaints were dismissed. We urge you to seriously consider the many concerns we have raised here. And please let us know by Friday, November 20, 2026, whether OLLI Mason is cancelling this hateful and biased course, so that we can consider next steps.

Very truly yours,





Morton A. Klein
National President

Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice

cc: OLLI Mason Board of Directors (via email)
Dr. Gregory Washington, President of George Mason University (via email)