

Dear UMB Community,

On behalf of the UMB University Student Government Association (USGA), we are writing with deep concern regarding the current situation in the Middle East involving Israel and Palestine. Now, almost three months past October 7<sup>th</sup>, wherein terror attacks committed by Hamas resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 people in Israel and the abduction of hundreds of hostages<sup>1</sup>. Since then, Israeli military policy in the region has resulted in the deaths of over 20,000 and displaced nearly 2 million Palestinian civilians<sup>1</sup>. Multiple international organizations have described these deaths and the ongoing Israeli military siege of Gaza and the West Bank as a dire humanitarian crisis and infringements of international law.<sup>2-4</sup> The recent events are having tangible and visceral effects on many in our UMB community, especially among those who have personal connections to the region. Additionally, the collective grief and sorrow are exacerbated by decades of historical conflict, occupation, and violence in the region. Compounding this harm, we have witnessed devastating violence within the U.S. because of significant increases in incidences of Islamophobia and Antisemitism.

**As members of the UMB community, we recognize that many have felt the University's responses to this escalation and the reverberating global effects left students feeling inadequately supported due to generic wording and a lack of continued communication during the conflict.** The previous two messages have fallen short of cultivating an environment to make many students feel safe, heard, and supported. While USGA is not assuming the role to promote any one political side over others, we do feel it is imperative to honor our responsibility to stand in solidarity with and validate the very real pain and anguish being felt across our UMB community, and most especially our fellow students. Therefore, the USGA would like to echo and build upon previous efforts.

With events continuing to unfold, we want to clearly express that **we unequivocally condemn the killing of all civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, regardless of faith, ethnicity, or race. We believe Palestinians are human beings and should be able to live free from occupation, inequality, and oppression. We believe Israelis are human beings and should be able to live free of violent attacks and threats against them.**<sup>5</sup> We condemn the collective punishment of people based on their identities, targeted hospital bombings, the use of human shields, sexual violence, and other attacks against innocent people. The reverberations of these mass losses of human life are felt all over the world, including at UMB, and the **USGA stands in support of a permanent ceasefire of this conflict, immediate humanitarian relief to Gaza, release of all hostages, and diplomatic resolution.**

**The USGA condemns all forms of hate, including Islamophobia and Antisemitism,** and wants to reemphasize the support available on campus if you feel you have been subject to bias and/or discrimination based on your identity: **UMB's Title IX Hotline**. Additionally, while not something we have seen at UMB, **the USGA condemns censorship of student voices,** as seen at other US institutions of higher education. We express gratitude towards the UMB students, faculty, and staff who have been leading the way in ensuring that our community remains safe and acknowledged. For those looking for safe spaces, we direct you to the **Student Counseling Center, Office of International Services, Intercultural Center,** and **Writing Center**. The Writing Center will be available to assist students in creating their own statements and evaluating statements made within their professions. As we move into the winter break, we want to note that these UMB resources will be unavailable during parts of that break. Considering this brief intermission in campus mental health support, please be aware that the **National Mental Health Hotline – 988** – is available 24/7 and provides immediate and free connection to a counselor for those that may need to talk.

May this letter make evident that your fellow students and UMB community members have not forgotten that the devastating effects of this conflict are still ongoing. As future public servants, we hope you will join us in using this collective winter break, not only as a time for connection with loved ones and rejuvenation, but also for self-education and self-reflection. As we continue to have conversations and build forums for open dialogue, we encourage you to challenge your beliefs as we are all limited by dogmatically following only our perspectives. As we all, including the USGA, complete this self-reflection, **we encourage you to think of additional ways UMB, particularly USGA, can improve its student support on these issues. Please report these suggestions/issues via the [Student Issues Form](#).** Responses to this form are confidentially read by the USGA President and considered with care.

Finally, we want to emphasize **UMB's core values** of respect, integrity, equity, and justice. With that in mind, we acknowledge the pain and suffering being felt by many on campus. We echo President Jarrell by remaining committed to fostering a better future and hoping for a rapid resolution that brings peace to the region in Israel and Palestine, and we stand in solidarity with those who yearn for the same. We hope to cultivate an environment where advocating for the humanity of any peoples is not mutually exclusive from ensuring the security of others.

Sincerely,

USGA Executive Board and Senate

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA)(<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-62>)

<sup>2</sup>United Nations Secretary General Invocation of Article 99 (<https://press.un.org/en/2023/db231206.doc.htm>)

<sup>3</sup>B'Tselem, Israeli Humanitarian Organization

([https://www.btselem.org/gaza\\_strip/20231207\\_humanitarian\\_catastrophe\\_as\\_policy](https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/20231207_humanitarian_catastrophe_as_policy))

<sup>4</sup>United Nations Population Fund (<https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-palestine-situation-report-3-14-november-2023>)

<sup>5</sup>Solutions Not Sides (<https://solutionsnotsides.co.uk/resources/community-support>)