



## Council on American-Islamic Relations

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February 5, 2025

Debra P. Wilson  
President  
National Association of Independent Schools  
2001 K Street NW, Suite 1150  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Wilson:

We are writing on behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. We write to request a meeting to discuss the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) leadership's alleged abusive treatment of the legitimate viewpoints of two speakers and various attendees, who gave at least one of those speakers a standing ovation, at your December 4-7, 2024 People of Color Conference (PoCC). People who believe that Palestinian lives have value deserve better from you. We also wish to discuss leadership's subsequent [decision to adopt a policy of apparent viewpoint discrimination](#) toward future PoCC speakers.

The level of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism needed to make your leadership comfortable with this alleged abusive treatment and apparent future viewpoint discrimination is appalling.

NAIS sent a communication after the speech critiquing the keynote speaker's use of the term "genocide" and citation of Jewish Voice for Peace. That communication says she was contracted to speak about "Islamophobia" and her remarks about Israel were "unexpected." This further reinforces the impression that your leadership fails to value Muslims, Palestinians, and others who value Palestinian life. For months now, organizations like CAIR have documented a surge in Islamophobia in the United States and concluded, "[the primary force behind this wave of heightened Islamophobia was onset of the latest round of violence in Israel's decades long occupation and use of apartheid policies in Palestine in October of last year.](#)" No speech addressing the problem of Islamophobia, any form of bigotry for that matter, can be meaningful without understanding what drives it.

Prior to the PoCC, a substantive body of international human rights experts referred to Israel's actions in Gaza as genocide (see below). Amnesty International's declaration was distributed by *The Associated Press* the day prior to the December 5 keynote speech. Despite this, the day after the speech, NAIS leadership rebuked a speaker whose family members were executed in a horrific act of Islamophobia. This rebuke of the speaker and your guests who gave her a standing ovation appears to have occurred because she agreed with a Jewish-led organization, Jewish Voice for Peace, that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians. You double down on this in your December 12, 2024 response to the Anti-Defamation League, calling the term 'genocide' "divisive and hurtful rhetoric."

On its website, NAIS asserts thinking independently, leading change, embracing diversity, championing inclusivity, and empowering community are its five key values. Based on extensive reporting from both conference participants and media outlets, you appear to have overseen the decision to abandon NAIS's principles of diversity to adopt a myopic view of a decades-long conflict in which you have no apparent subject matter expertise. This body of evidence indicates your response to your People of Color Conference keynote speaker's presentation

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uncouples NAIS from all five values. Your reported decision to adopt a policy of signing off on future speakers' remarks indicates that people of color and diverse viewpoints will now have to comply with viewpoint discrimination or be deplatformed.

This suggests dire consequences for the Muslim, Arab, Jewish, Christian, Asian American, African American, and other students who value Palestinian life whom your organization can influence.

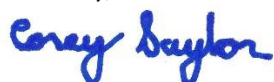
On June 4, 2024, "a consortium of human rights centers at colleges across the world" using an "objective, methodological, and detailed analysis" concluded, "[Israel has committed genocidal acts, namely killing, seriously harming, and inflicting conditions of life calculated, and intended to, bring about the physical destruction of Palestinians in Gaza](#)," according to one of the report's contributors. On October 11, 2024, independent human rights experts with the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner issued a statement naming "[Israel's genocidal offensive in Gaza](#)." On November 21, 2024, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu saying he is "allegedly responsible for the [war crimes of starvation as a method of warfare and of intentionally directing an attack against the civilian population](#);" and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts." On December 4, the day prior to the keynote speech, [Amnesty International announced their conclusion that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza](#). This reputable international human rights organization's announcement was covered by *The Associated Press*, so easily available to anyone doing an internet search.<sup>1</sup>

Further, Israeli civil society acknowledges their occupation is like South African apartheid. [Israel's former attorney general](#) said his state is an "apartheid regime." The [Israeli Law Professors' Forum for Democracy](#) says "Israel practices apartheid." Here in the U.S., conservative columnist [Thomas Friedman](#) also used the term apartheid.

We believe your speakers and guests deserve a public apology from NAIS leadership. Further, NAIS must enact a policy to ensure that in the future diverse viewpoints are not met with the abusive treatment displayed in December. Finally, it is clear there is an urgent need for you and your staff to participate in anti-Muslim racism training.

We look forward to your prompt reply to this letter.

Sincerely,



Corey Saylor  
Research and Advocacy Director

CC: Caroline Blackwell, Myra McGovern, other board and school leaders

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<sup>1</sup> [Human Rights Watch came to the same conclusion, Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, a few days later.](#)

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