

July 31, 2025

Dr. Robert M. Groves
Georgetown University Interim President
Office of the President
204 Healy Hall
37th & O Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20057

Re: Georgetown University Must Cease Disciplinary Action Against Dr. Jonathan Brown and Defend Academic Freedom

Dear Interim President Groves:

As civil rights, faith-based, advocacy, and academic organizations committed to the principles of justice, academic freedom, and equal treatment, we write to express our serious concern over Georgetown University's decision to investigate and discipline Dr. Jonathan Brown following a bad-faith campaign mischaracterizing his private social media activity. Georgetown University has had more than two weeks to reinstate Dr. Brown and halt any further disciplinary proceedings since announcing its actions during the July 15 hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, an event led by members of Congress with well-documented histories of Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian bias.

Dr. Brown is recognized not only for his scholarly contributions to Islamic Studies but also for his efforts to advance racial justice, interfaith understanding and academic freedom. These are values that clearly align with the mission of Georgetown University. The possibility that the university would pursue punitive action against such a faculty member based on a politically motivated smear campaign targeting his private speech, rather than any actual misconduct, is deeply troubling and unbecoming of Georgetown.

As you know, the controversy centers on a tweet Dr. Brown posted following the Trump administration's deadly escalation with Iran last month.

After the Trump administration risked an all-out regional war by bombing Iranian nuclear facilities despite the fact that U.S. intelligence agencies reported that Iran was not pursuing a nuclear weapon, Professor Brown tried to express hope that Iran's retaliation would be minimal and that the war would then quickly end. Brown wrote, "*I'm not an expert, but I assume Iran could still get a bomb easily. I hope Iran does some symbolic strike on a base, then everyone stops.*"

In response to bad-faith critics who falsely claimed that he was encouraging war, Dr. Brown deleted the original tweet and wrote: *“I deleted my previous tweet because a lot of people were interpreting it as a call for violence. That’s not what I intended. I have two immediate family members in the US military who’ve served abroad and wouldn’t want any harm to befall American soldiers... or anyone!”*

Expressing hope for a symbolic Iranian response that would lead to a swift end to the war was the clear intent of his original message. It was also a sentiment shared by many Americans, and it is exactly what ultimately happened: Iran launched a telegraphed, symbolic strike on a U.S. military base in Qatar that harmed no one, President Trump declined to respond, and the war ended.

Dr. Brown’s wording may have been abbreviated by the nature of the platform, but his underlying message was clear: he hoped the violence would cease. That sentiment was neither extreme nor unusual - it was, in fact, ultimately vindicated by events.

To frame Dr. Brown’s comment as unpatriotic or violent, as some have done, requires a willful misreading of his intent and of the broader context of the brief U.S.-Iran war. That such misreadings are now being used to pressure the university into investigating and possibly punishing a respected professor is not only unjust. It also sets a dangerous precedent for academic freedom and principled dissent on campus.

Universities must not allow their disciplinary processes to be hijacked by ideological pressure campaigns or online outrage mobs. Doing so undermines the integrity of the institution and chills open discourse, especially when the target is a Muslim scholar whose views may already be unfairly scrutinized in public debate.

We urge Georgetown University to immediately cease any investigation or disciplinary action related to Dr. Brown’s tweet. Instead, the university should affirm its commitment to protecting academic freedom, resisting political intimidation, and standing with faculty members who have dedicated their careers to the pursuit of knowledge, justice, and dialogue. Dr. Brown should be fully reinstated as chair, and no further action should be taken against him.

Sincerely,

American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

American Coalition For Good Government

American Muslim Voice Foundation

American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)

Americans for Democratic Values

Americans for Justice in Palestine Action (AJP Action)

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine

CAIR Action

Center for Security, Race and Rights

Coalition for Civil Freedoms

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

ICNA Council for Social Justice

Institute for the Critical Study of Zionism

Islamic Circle of North America

Islamic Council of New England

Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

Islamic Society of Orange County, CA

Islamophobia Studies Center

Libyan American Alliance

Majlis Ash-Shura: Islamic Leadership Council of New York

MAS PACE

MAS-DC

MPower Change Action Fund

MSA National

Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)

Muslim Public Affairs Council

Muslim Students Association of the US & Canada

Queen's University Belfast Palestine Assembly

US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO)

World Kashmir Awareness Forum