

# PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

## Statement of Support for Dr. Lara Sheehi<sup>i</sup>

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) has, since its inception, refused to be a silent bystander to unfair and vicious attacks on those who advocate for global human rights and justice. We proudly support our friend, fellow member and colleague, Dr. Lara Sheehi, in her courageous, thoughtful, and powerful scholarship and activism in support of the human rights of Palestinians. Many organizations and individuals, including some politicians, demand that we blind ourselves to the violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. This willful deflection inevitably maintains their dehumanization. PsySR refuses to ignore these violations, and we express unwavering support for Dr. Sheehi's fearless truth-telling.

Dr. Sheehi, like many other scholars, past and present, has been unjustly, ruthlessly, and wrongly attacked for speaking truths that others prefer to bury--or are coerced into burying. Dr. Sheehi refused to comply with the onslaught of aggressive attempts to intimidate academics and clinicians into silence about the settler-colonial violence of apartheid Israel. These attempts often amount to gaslighting academics and clinicians by wrongly equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism. Dr. Sheehi's Jewish colleagues, in a powerful letter to George Washington University, have clarified this difference, and have reminded us of the long and terrible history of StandWithUs, the organization attacking Dr. Sheehi; a history of attempts to silence just criticism of an apartheid state.

*As Jewish clinicians, we condemn the tactics and very definitions of antisemitism that groups like StandWithUs rely on to slander those who stand up for the rights of Palestinians and other oppressed peoples.<sup>ii</sup>*

A publication by Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights refers to tactics by StandWithUs specifically, in efforts to stymie pro-Palestine sentiment at several universities, beginning as early as 2009.<sup>iii</sup>

We know from the histories of our founders and members that refusal to be silent, and instead speaking unpopular truths, is often punished. In the words of Judith Herman,

*Like all other bystanders, therapists are sometimes forced to take sides. Those who stand with the victim will inevitably have to face the perpetrator's unmasked fury. For many of us, there can be no greater honor.<sup>iv</sup>*

We also know that the alternative—complicity by silence-- is unthinkable.

As scholars, practitioners, and global human rights advocates, PsySR members refuse to remain silent in order to avoid hateful criticism and unjust threats, and we applaud Dr. Sheehi for her refusal to be silenced. We call on George Washington University to provide the necessary support to Dr. Sheehi, and by standing up for her right to speak the truth, also stand up for the rights of the Palestinian people.

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<sup>i</sup> Released February 6, 2023

<sup>ii</sup> Letter of Support for Dr. Lara Sheehi by Jewish Colleagues — Palestine Global Mental Health Network <https://www.pgmhn.org/statements/letter-of-support-for-dr-lara-sheehi-by-jewish-colleagues>

<sup>iii</sup> The Palestine Exception to Free Speech: A Movement Under Attack, September 2015 <https://ccrjustice.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/09/Palestine%20Exception%20Report%20Final.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Herman, J. (1997) *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.