



Graduate Employee Organization UAW 2322

"UMass Works Because WE Do!"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: APRIL 19, 2016

**Media contact: Anais N. Surkin, Union Representative/Organizer:
917-940-0312, anais@uaw2322.org**

UMass Amherst Union of Graduate Student Workers Endorses BDS!

Members of the Graduate Employee Organization at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst vote overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution to join the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement!

During a three day (April 12-14) vote, by secret ballot, the [Graduate Employee Organization \(GEO/UAW2322\)](#) at University of Massachusetts in Amherst [voted overwhelmingly \(95%\)](#) in favor of adopting a [resolution](#) to stand in solidarity with Palestinian civil society and join the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement. The largest collective bargaining unit within UAW Local Amalgamated 2322 (UAW 2322), GEO represents over 2,000 graduate student workers at the flagship campus of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. This makes GEO the second major body of unionized workers in the U.S. to formally join the BDS movement by membership vote.

This resolution renews and furthers a 2003 GEO resolution to divest from the Israeli occupation, and honors the [2005 call](#) from Palestinian civil society-- including trade unions, university faculty, and student groups-- to embrace BDS worldwide as a tactic to put political and economic pressure on the Israeli state until it complies with international law and respects the human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories. The resolution also calls on our employer, UMass, and our union, the UAW, to divest from and boycott companies that fuel and profit from the military occupation and repression of Palestinians. During a period of open dialogue when all members were encouraged to express diverse views, engage and organize, both the GEO Black Caucus and [Jewish GEO members publicly endorsed the resolution](#).

A similar resolution [passed in December 2014 by UAW 2865, the student-worker union](#) at the University of California (UC) was later nullified by the International Executive Board of the UAW. That nullification is currently under appeal. GEO and our local, [UAW2322, stand with the UC union's decision to appeal the nullification of their democratic vote to embrace BDS. We urge the UAW International to respect the democratic membership vote to endorse BDS](#), and in doing so we invite them to join us on the right side of history.

Quotes from GEO/UAW Members:

Santiago Vidales, GEO Co-Chair

"The fact that an overwhelming majority of our union voted for BDS is a testament to what social justice unionism looks like. Over and over again we were asked why GEO was getting

GEO/UAW2322

201 Student Union Amherst, MA 01003

Ph: 413.545.0705 Fx: 413.545.1457

geo@external.umass.edu



Graduate Employee Organization UAW 2322

"UMass Works Because WE Do!"

involved in world politics. The reality is that Palestinian workers on our campus are entitled to their basic human and civil rights when they travel back home. By answering the call of the BDS Movement in Palestine, GEO members join other graduate worker unions across the country in demanding that our universities, our unions, and our communities boycott and divest from Israel's violent occupation of Palestinian territories. We know that our principled stand will be criticized, scrutinized and challenged. But we know that we are building a movement for liberation. The liberation of Palestinian people is inherently connected to our own."

Kevina King and Tiamba Wilkerson, GEO Black Caucus Executive Board

"The Black Caucus is immensely proud that our union put its proverbial "money where its mouth is" and voted in support of justice for the Palestinian people. It is especially meaningful for the Black Caucus, as we recognize the historical links between the liberation struggles of Black and Palestinian people, and how our traditions of resistance continue to inspire other oppressed and marginalized peoples across the world. International solidarity, particularly between Black and Palestinian people, is as important now as it has ever been, as both communities continue to fight state sanctioned terrorism and racist violence."

Ghazah Abbasi, GEO member, Department of Sociology

"Global capitalism is a colonial, white-supremacist, heteropatriarchal system that alienates us deeply and multiply. A key part of overcoming our alienation is understanding our common humanity with other workers and peoples within and outside the US. It would be deeply contradictory for graduate student workers of UMass Amherst to campaign for our own rights while being complacent about the atrocious rights-violations taking place in Israel with the ideological and financial backing of the United States government. As a GEO member, I am deeply gratified to see that my union is committed to advocating for the fundamental dignity and equality of all workers, and all people, throughout the world. Peoples' rights as workers are 'legal' rights dependent on the security of their other 'natural' inalienable rights - such as the right to food, physical security, physical mobility, and freedom from violence. Yet these basic rights are consistently denied to the Palestinian peoples by the state of Israel. Because there can be no conditions for fair and equitable work under colonialism and military siege, it is imperative to demand the immediate and unqualified decolonization of Palestine."

Alyssa Goldstein, GEO/UAW2322 Palestine Solidarity Caucus Member

As a Jewish GEO member and one of the drafters of the ["Jews Support BDS"](#) letter, I am so proud to see this resolution pass with overwhelming support. The state of Israel does not stand for or represent the Jewish people, and we must not allow its oppression of the Palestinians to continue in our name. The Jewish activists, in my union and elsewhere, who speak out for Palestinian equality uphold the tradition of the Jewish commitment to justice.

GEO/UAW2322

201 Student Union Amherst, MA 01003

Ph: 413.545.0705 Fx: 413.545.1457

geo@external.umass.edu