

Dear Sergeant Rodriguez,

I would like to formally apologize to you for the way our interaction went on May 7th, 2024.

I would first like to contextualize my behavior that day. You might not know, but I am Lebanese. I lived in Lebanon until 2018- I moved to Massachusetts when I was 16. I have familial roots in Palestine and one of the most important things to me is and has been clarifying the misinformation surrounding Palestine that I have seen since moving here. I became involved with Students for Justice in Palestine as soon as I started at UMass in 2021. At that time, Palestine was not so well known, and meetings were typically just me and my group of friends. We organized and held teach-ins, cultural events, art making, and guest lectures that fewer than 20 students would attend. On October 7th, our lives changed- in many ways- when the genocide began in Gaza. Suddenly I was watching children that look like my cousins, women that talk like my mother, and boys who share names with my brothers be brutally massacred in real time. At the same time as I was experiencing such debilitating grief, Students for Justice in Palestine became a lot more important. Suddenly, our meetings were made up of tens of students that filled entire lecture halls, and our protest numbers went into the hundreds. Universities were being confronted for their complicity by having investments in weapons technology, which directly benefits from war. I felt an immense responsibility to harness my privileges, being safe and overseas while my family suffered back home- to create a movement that reduces harm, emphasizes peace, and aims for liberation.

On May 7th, 2024, hundreds were present, asserting themselves for the cause. Together we sang songs, danced, exchanged books, and paid artful tributes to the martyrs of Palestine and Lebanon. When police entered, I saw those in attendance become scared, and soon I watched as students, faculty, and community members took each other's hands and asserted themselves- putting their bodies on the line to protest. It was a devastating sight. I was shocked and scared watching my professors being handcuffed and taken away, which is around the time that you and I crossed paths. You were laughing and attempting to joke and I was really upset by that. I now realize that you were just doing your job- and I don't hold that against you. I too, often make jokes in uncomfortable situations, and I would hope that shouldn't implicate people's judgements of me as a person. The truth is, it felt to me like a culmination of everything I had been experiencing up to that moment. Like something I was witnessing felt so grim, so dark, and to you it meant nothing.

As I'm writing this, I am once again watching Lebanon be bombed from a distance. I feel a deep sickness in the pit of my stomach every day as I go to work, knowing that every time my phone buzzes another bomb has struck, while my coworkers go about their lives in total ignorance. I feel broken knowing that even if I did engage in protest and organize the way I did in college, still nothing would change. In that way, I guess, the system has succeeded in breaking my spirit. It is 2026, I am writing this letter, in reference to something that happened almost two years ago. A moment of anger, guilt, and fear that represents total insignificance in the vastness of these two years of ongoing genocide.

Once again, I want to reiterate my apology to you. The state of the world is not your fault, I should never place that responsibility onto you and engage with you with so much resentment and disrespect. It was never about you, to me you were an objectified representation of the system, laughing at me, at all of us resisting. I hope you can understand.

Maysoun