

Letter of Solidarity

Dated: 22 February 2016

To

Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union

Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association

All students, faculty, and non-teaching staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University

Being research scholars and students registered with various academic departments of Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, we, the undersigned, extend our support and solidarity to the students, faculty, and non-teaching staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University in these difficult times of hatred, violence, media trials, and dubious accusations. We unequivocally condemn:

- unwarranted and misplaced allegations being made against Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) by constitutional authorities as well as by certain media houses. JNU is one the premier centres of higher education in India and has rendered yeoman service towards fusing excellence in education with inclusivity. Whether in terms of fee structure or the rigors of academics or of student politics, JNU is a model university whose example other universities should emulate. It has produced some of the best academics in this country, scholars who are faculty members in universities all over India, including Jamia Millia Islamia. Any allegations against JNU must be weighed carefully, and we condemn the unseemly haste with which politicians, government officers, and media houses are, apparently, conspiring to condemn JNU in the wider public imagination.
- the vitriolic and violent rhetoric of nationalism put in circulation by constitutional authorities and media houses. As responsible citizens we expect a certain restraint and dignity from public servants and members of the Executive and the Legislature. We have, unfortunately, been exposed to the shameful spectacle of Central Ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of Legislative Assemblies propounding brutal and bloodthirsty violence against 'anti-India' persons, without any open discussion of what – beyond the iterative framework of our sedition laws – 'anti-India' constitutes. The arms of

governance and the state seem to have capitulated to an aggressive brutality of the worst kind, and we condemn the manner in which elected public authorities are violently threatening, defaming, and abusing their fellow citizens in this shameful fashion.

- the arrest of President of Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) Mr Kanhaiya Kumar on charges of alleged sedition. There are too many claims and counterclaims, too many videos being bandied on the internet as evidence, for any clarity to instantaneously emerge on the matter. This charge against Mr Kumar seems politically motivated with malafide intentions to undo the good work Mr Kumar has been involved in as JNUSU President, Occupy UGC being one of them. We condemn the manner in which Mr Kumar has been singled as an 'anti-national' person by certain media houses; these are the same media houses which did not bother to report his, and others', involvement in a number of campaigns run against gender and caste based discrimination, as well as against capitalist exploitation.
- the 'hunt' for Mr Umar Khalid. Notwithstanding the offensive manner the search for Mr Khalid has been morphed into a 'hunt', we condemn the manner in which the incidence of his religion, of his name being indicative of Islam, is taken as corroborative evidence of his tend against India. As part of Jamia Millia Islamia, we are all too familiar with the demeaning and degrading manner in which this argument proceeds, the manner in which Muslim youth are viewed with suspicion by functionaries of the state and by media houses. This thinking is poisoning the secular fabric of our country, and we condemn the overwhelmingly public perpetuation of this regressive outlook.
- the shocking violence perpetuated by lawyers, or persons disguised as lawyers, against teachers and students of JNU and against journalists in the Patiala House Court. We feel obliged to remind these lawyers that many of the founding fathers of this country were also lawyers, and they chose a different path to channelize their rage: B R Ambedkar, Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, these and many others chose paths of rationality over emotion, discussion over violence in times far more trying than ours. These are the examples which lawyers in our times would do well to keep in mind; otherwise they shame themselves, and prove unworthy of their profession, by descending to hooliganism and rioting.

- the increasingly interventionist attitude being adopted by the Government of India in the everyday functioning of autonomous universities and institutions of higher education. We strongly believe that centres of education have to be administered and managed by educationists, by persons whose long experience and habit of academics puts them in professional and personal sync with the needs and aspirations of students, faculty, and non-teaching staff. The unfortunate events culminating in the suicide of Mr Rohith Vemula, doctoral candidate with the University of Hyderabad, have made painfully apparent the consequences of ill-designed external interventions in the working of universities and colleges. We believe that universities and colleges must be guided through collectivist and consensual democratic processes generated from within; we condemn the heavy hand of authority which the present dispensation of the Government of India is bringing to bear upon centres of higher education.

We urge the appropriate arms of the Government of India to work towards the release of Mr Kumar, to provide adequate police protection to Mr Khalid and his family, and to charge all those involved in rioting and issuance of verbal threats and defamatory statements with criminal action under the appropriate provisions of the Indian Penal Code. We extend our warm congratulations to the students, faculty, and non-teaching staff of JNU for presenting a united front against the many baseless allegations being made against them by public authorities. JNU and its students and teachers have been a beacon of hope and reason in the fight for inclusivity in a society ridden with systemic poverty and with gender, caste, and communal discrimination, and we vouch our heartfelt support to the JNU community as it confidently asserts its will towards a better, safer, happier India even as it lies beleaguered by regressive and violent forces.

Signed:

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