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For Immediate Release

ELECTED OFFICIALS CALLED FOR PRINCIPAL ALMONTASER'S REINSTATEMENT

Community members and parents vow not to be silent

Thursday, September 20, 2007 By the steps of the New York City Department of Education's Tweed Courthouse yesterday, several New York City elected officials, parents and community members called for the reinstatement of Debbie Almontaser as principal of the Khalil Gibran International Academy, a new Brooklyn-based public school where students learn Arabic along with the content that is integral to every New York City public school. Almontaser was forced to resign after a six-month anti-Arab and anti-Muslim campaign against her and the school.

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz recalled the many years he has known her as "a force of openness and cross cultural conversation" and stressed that "the Khalil Gibran International Academy, as we all know, was Debbie's vision." He called the attacks and insinuations against her "disgraceful, xenophobic, and racist." And Rabbi Michael Paley reminded us, "If Debbie Almontaser is painted in that way, then no one is safe."

Speaking as Chair of the City Council's Education Committee, Robert Jackson (D-Manhattan) was emphatic: "What happened to her is wrong. What's happening to the school is wrong. And we're standing up and saying that we must correct that injustice." Asking them to stand up and fight bigotry and racism, he announced his intention to make "an appeal in writing...to Chancellor Joel Klein and Mayor Bloomberg to please reconsider your actions. Sometimes it's O.K. to stand up and say you made a mistake. Being an adult, stand up and say you made a mistake" and stand up and say she needs to be reinstated."

City Councilmember John Liu (D-Queens) stressed the DOE's lack of support for Debbie: "They are at fault for not saying anything [during] the past month. They are sending the worst kind of message to New Yorkers and to all school kids—that they will buckle under the slightest pressure. So what they need to do is send the right message and set an example for the school kids in New York...and to give full support for the nurturing and the full launch and success of the KGIA. And what they must do is to invite Debbie Almontaser back as principal of KGIA."

While asking the Mayor and Chancellor to reconsider and allow the school's founder and visionary to continue to lead it, State Senator Bill Perkins (D-Manhattan) observed, "There's much more support for her than might be evident." He then went on to talk about people's fears of being attacked in the press.

Although she was unable to attend the press conference, the written statement of Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Urban Education at CUNY, spoke for many New Yorkers: "Given her long history as a peace educator in New York City, and her vital role in coalition building post 9/11, the loss of Almontaser as Principal of KGIA throws a shadow of shame on us all: what my mother, Rose Fine, a Jewish immigrant from Poland would call a "shande"—a deep, penetrating shame that saturates the soul of our civic community."

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