

# Statement Regarding Former RZIM Senior Leadership Team Members Michael Ramsden, Sarah (Davis) Phillips,<sup>1</sup> and Abdu Murray

November 9, 2022

On December 22, 2020, Miller & Martin PLLC released an interim report on its “independent investigation into allegations of sexual harassment raised against Ravi Zacharias.”<sup>2</sup> The interim report “found significant, credible evidence that Mr. Zacharias engaged in sexual misconduct over the course of many years.” This abuse was consistent with that which was reported in the past and in the news. More serious abuse was also uncovered.

Even before that interim report was published, numerous current and former RZIM staff members made public statements reporting abusive treatment of RZIM employees who dared to advocate on behalf of Zacharias’ reported victims or question Zacharias’ innocence going back to the Lori Anne Thompson allegations in 2017. The employees speaking out included [Dr. Max Baker-Hytch](#), [Jordan Thyer](#), [Rev. Dr. John Dickson](#), [Sam Allberry](#), [Daniel Gilman](#) and [Carson Weitnauer](#).

On January 11, 2021, a group of Christian apologists and philosophers published an open letter stating, “We are united in urging Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) to approach the current investigation with transparency and objectivity with a view to full disclosure of the facts to the public. Where necessary, the RZIM Board of Directors and leadership should also both openly acknowledge their own complicity and initiate institutional reforms at RZIM as well as provide restitution to those wronged.”<sup>3</sup>

On February 6, 2021, RZIM spokesperson Ruth Malhotra sent a [26-page letter](#) to the RZIM Board Chair which was shortly made public. This letter outlined in great detail the failure of RZIM leadership to hold Zacharias accountable. It also addressed what appeared to be abusive and bullying

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<sup>1</sup> Since leaving RZIM, former CEO Sarah Davis has remarried and her current name is Sarah Phillips. We refer to her in his document as Sarah (Davis) Phillips to allow some continuity with previous reports in which she is referred to as Sarah Davis.

<sup>2</sup> [Interim Report of the Investigation into Allegations of Sexual Harassment by Ravi Zacharias](#). Miller & Martin PLLC. Lynsey M. Barron Esq. December 22, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> <https://julieroys.com/christian-apologists-rzim-complicity-zacharias-scandal/>.

behavior from RZIM leadership toward those pressing for greater accountability and transparency pertaining to the allegations against Zacharias.

On February 9, 2021, the Miller & Martin investigation report was published confirming the truth of the allegations against Zacharias. However, as the report indicates, the “scope of our engagement did not extend to RZIM finances, possible retaliation against employees, or other aspects of the organization’s culture.”

In response to pressure on many fronts, RZIM contracted Guidepost Solutions to investigate “structures, culture, policies, processes, finances, and practices, including the handling of any former abuse allegations.”<sup>4</sup> The final report was issued on August 2, 2021. It was not released to the public until six months later and then only after it was discovered that *Christianity Today* had obtained a copy.<sup>5</sup> RZIM has since removed the report from its website.

We were very troubled when RZIM decided not to publicly release the Guidepost Report when it was completed. Once it was made public, it became apparent why they were so reluctant to have it made public. The report helped to make it clear to us that there were serious injustices and abuses perpetrated against former RZIM employees by members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) that justified further inquiry.

Since no apologetics governing body exists that is responsible for such an inquiry, it was our conviction that as apologists committed to truth and the integrity of the apologetics community and the global church, we are responsible. Therefore, we believe that we had both a spiritual and moral obligation to set up a committee to make an inquiry and follow the evidence wherever it led. The committee included Dr. William Lane Craig, Dr. Paul Copan, Dr. Mike Licona, Debbie Licona and Dr. Sean McDowell. Our investigative process ultimately included approximately 1,000 hours of research. We interviewed 25 people, some on multiple occasions, obtained and studied copious amounts of supporting documentation, and consulted with experts on abuse and institutional response to abuse, including Dr. Wade Mullen.

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<sup>4</sup> Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Guidepost Solutions Assessment. Guidepost Solutions LLC. August 3, 2021. p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Silliman Daniel. [RZIM Spent Nearly 1 Million Suing Abuse Victim](#). *Christianity Today*. February 23, 2022

We now submit our findings. This is not a comprehensive report of all that took place at RZIM, but rather a summary of the types of abuse and deception that were representative of RZIM's organizational culture. Based on the evidence acquired from our inquiry, we have come to the following conclusions:

1. Numerous RZIM staff members globally who pushed back or asked legitimate questions during the period of 2017-21 were intimidated, mistreated, or retaliated against by members of RZIM's Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Those employees were doing what the SLT had a responsibility to do and failed to do.
2. Many of these RZIM employees subsequently went public with their concerns. To this day, Sarah (Davis) Phillips, Michael Ramsden, and Abdu Murray assert that these employees were wrong in doing so. Michael Ramsden went further, stating that these employees were part of "The Resistance" to bring the ministry down. In contrast, Dr. Diane Langberg, who has worked for over 50 years with trauma victims, stated that, when abuse is occurring inside of a system, you have to go outside the system for justice.<sup>6</sup> We believe these employees acted in a way that was morally necessary.
3. Regrettably, some former RZIM employees, as well as some leaders in the church and the apologetics community, have been influenced by Sarah (Davis) Phillips, Michael Ramsden, and Abdu Murray to believe the worst about the employees who have raised public concerns. We acknowledge the pain (Davis) Phillips experienced as a result of her father's actions that warranted sympathy and support. However, because of their actions toward their employees, these three individuals have positioned themselves as "victims", rather than offenders, and have garnered undue sympathy and support. We believe this report provides a detailed and factual basis for reconsidering their narrative.<sup>7</sup>
4. When some RZIM employees in the UK asked questions regarding the allegations against Zacharias, Ramsden threatened them with extradition to the United States. The reason for extradition, according to Ramsden at that time, was because to even talk about the Thompson matter was a breach of the non-disclosure agreement between Zacharias and Thompson. When asked about this during our interview, Ramsden responded, "What is 'extradite?'" We found this answer astounding, since Ramsden has a law degree and is a former teacher of jurisprudence.
5. A very well documented area in which the SLT participated in spiritual and emotional abuse is in the "conciliation" practices of Judy Dabler.<sup>8</sup> Dabler was investigated by Ken Sande, the founder of Peacemaker Ministries and RW360, who found her methods to be spiritually abusive at times. Amongst some RZIM employees, Dabler was known as "The Enforcer" brought in by Ramsden and (Davis) Phillips to reign in "errant troublemakers" and bring

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<sup>6</sup> [Church abuse, scandals and RZIM](#): Rachel Denhollander, Amy Orr-Ewing, Mike Cospser and Dr. Diane Langberg. Justin Brierly podcast. Premier Unbelievable. September 22, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> <https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/defineDARVO.html>

<sup>8</sup> Silliman, Daniel. [The Christian Peacemaker Who Left a Trail of Trauma](#). *Christianity Today*. November 16, 2021.

them in line.<sup>9</sup> Multiple employees remain in therapy due to their experience during these “conciliation” meetings. One employee’s therapist referred to what occurred as “psychological torture.” Even after the findings of the Sande investigation, neither Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips or Murray acknowledged any wrongdoing or even that wrongdoing had occurred during these meetings with Dabler. It is our opinion that every member of the SLT that participated in those meetings is responsible for what took place and harm perpetrated upon these individuals.

6. Though Sarah (Davis) Phillips claimed multiple times that RZIM staff had freedom of conscience to ask any question regarding the accusations against Zacharias, this did not prove to be the reality. We heard testimony and received documentation stating that SLT members chastised employees for asking questions. Subsequent to being chastised, some employees were asked if RZIM was a good fit for them. Many were eventually terminated. Though we cannot prove that anyone was terminated for pushing back and asking questions, the environment at RZIM was such that this would have been a reasonable inference.
7. RZIM spokesperson Ruth Malhotra was forced to go on extended leave when she became emotionally and physically exhausted from handling public relations crises related to the Lori Anne Thompson allegations and Zacharias’ false credential claims. SLT members called it a "sabbatical" and claimed it was for Malhotra’s well-being. We acknowledge that Malhotra was exhausted physically and emotionally and a sabbatical was in order. However, documentation and the testimonies of multiple witnesses convince us that the reason she was exhausted was due to the pressure she was being put under by the SLT and Ravi Zacharias himself. We have testimony and documentation which shows that Ramsden and Murray were very concerned about the fact that Malhotra took copious notes in staff meetings, and they came to believe she was building a dossier to take down the ministry. One witness reported that Ramsden and Murray had said they were trying to get Malhotra’s laptop away from her because they were scared about its possible contents. Before Malhotra went on her extended leave, all of her work electronic devices were confiscated (including passwords). This occurred at a time when Zacharias refused to turn over his devices. We have been disheartened to learn that some members of the SLT as well as other former RZIM employees have attempted to undermine Malhotra's credibility by referring to past communications in which she spoke charitably about members of SLT and Zacharias. Still, we reviewed the communications in question with an open mind. We observe that Malhotra was subjected to gaslighting, flattery, and manipulation during the same time that she was harshly retaliated against for raising important questions about Ravi’s behavior. We do not see Malhotra’s positive statements as invalidating her narrative. Rather, we have come to understand and verify that amongst other factors such as her deep loyalty to the ministry and hope in fellow Christians' best intentions, Malhotra was also experiencing a "fawning" response to trauma.<sup>10</sup> These accusations against Malhotra represent another instance of the

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<sup>9</sup> Sande, Ken., McCune, Candace. Maloney, Kristin. Decisions Professional Grievance Investigation Regarding Judy Dabler. Part 3. p.11.

<sup>10</sup> Rider, Gina. [The Fawn Response: How Trauma Can Lead to People Pleasing](#). PsychCentral. January 9, 2022.

established and sinful pattern at RZIM of blaming the victim rather than listening carefully and understanding the depth and complexity of the hurt.

8. We received numerous reports of a smear campaign against Malhotra and one other employee who wishes to remain anonymous. Members of the SLT told other staff members that these two employees were emotional, disloyal, and untrustworthy. We conclude this was a form of retaliation, as both of these employees pressed strongly for a thorough investigation and transparency from RZIM. This pattern of retributive action at RZIM caused great fear amongst many former RZIM employees who continue to fear retributive action might be initiated, even today, by Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips, and Murray.
9. In regard to Lori Anne Thompson's claims, in 2017, Murray claimed that Malhotra had moved from being skeptical to cynical. Murray himself explains what he means by those terms in his own podcast.<sup>11</sup> According to Murray, a skeptic is someone like the disciple Thomas who won't believe until there is proof. A cynic is someone like Pontius Pilate who won't believe even when there is evidence. We disagree with Murray's assessment; it was Malhotra who was looking at the evidence and who rightly questioned the legitimacy of the answers she was receiving.
10. We were immensely grieved to find that the late Nabeel Qureshi was not only mistreated while at RZIM, but also slandered after he was fired. We heard from multiple sources that Ravi Zacharias was jealous of Qureshi because he was getting more speaking requests than Zacharias. In one instance, Zacharias left Qureshi and his wife stranded at an event in order to prevent Qureshi from participating in an interview alongside Zacharias. Zacharias heavily propagated the false idea that Qureshi was a "womanizer" and "an alcoholic." Over the course of about a year, plans were made to fire Qureshi. When the decision was finally made to terminate him, Murray asked Qureshi to meet him at the Atlanta airport for what Qureshi was led to think was a friendly visit while Murray was on a layover. In reality, Murray had flown to Atlanta with the express purpose of firing Qureshi. (Davis) Phillips was likewise present at the firing. Just two weeks prior, Zacharias had told Qureshi that he was going to be Zacharias' successor. A month after being terminated, Qureshi was diagnosed with Stage 4 stomach cancer. Multiple former RZIM employees reported to us that they were told Qureshi was fired because he was an alcoholic. But the accusation was not true. Not only have we known Qureshi for over 15 years but we also confirmed it with his wife, Michelle, and his best friend in Houston who is a physician. Shortly after Qureshi was fired, Mike Licona questioned Murray regarding the reasons for the firing. Murray stated that it was because Qureshi was arrogant and had a problem with women. We found no evidence for womanizing by Qureshi. Moreover, Qureshi had an accountable and transparent friendship with this friend/physician with whom he often spoke three times per day and who is convinced of Qureshi's innocence. We suspect the rumor originated with Zacharias and was repeated by those who blindly trusted Zacharias. Given the meteoric rise of Qureshi's ministry and the accompanying understandable struggle with overconfidence and pride, we believe mentoring would have been more in order than firing.

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<sup>11</sup> Murray, Abdu [\*The Burden of Proof\*](#). All Rise Podcast. Season 1. Episode 1. October 6, 2022.

11. We have other testimonies that employees who pushed (Davis) Phillips to handle certain questionable situations were reprimanded by her for insubordination, accused of gossip or other spiritualized scolding by Ramsden and others, and sidelined for challenging leadership. The witnesses to this behavior are so afraid of retaliation or further trauma that we respectfully have not included the details in this report.
12. During our interview with Ramsden, he denied being a part of the SLT or even having an executive role at RZIM. However, we have obtained extensive documentation and testimony confirming Ramsden's executive role as President of RZIM as well as his participation on the SLT.
13. When Ramsden discovered that information given to RZIM staff and the public was incorrect, he made no efforts to correct the record allowing the false information to stand as truth. One glaring example is that he initially told RZIM staff that "no money had exchanged hands" with Lori Anne Thompson for the non-disclosure agreement. Yet once he learned this was false, rather than revealing this information, he allowed others to continue to believe that "no money had changed hands." These kinds of omissions occurred on more than one occasion, causing great concern amongst the staff and adding to the lack of trust in the SLT.
14. We acknowledge that (Davis) Phillips was in a terrible position and believe she has been traumatized by the actions of her father, Ravi Zacharias. To her credit, she submitted another accusation of sexual misconduct to Miller & Martin and it was she who pressed for the Guidepost investigation and restitution of Zacharias' victims. However, being a victim of her father's actions does not excuse (Davis) Phillips for her own behavior toward RZIM employees. When questioned about her actions in our interview, (Davis) Phillips responded by saying either "that was not her experience" or she had "no recollection of anyone feeling the way reported." We were provided with documentation and testimony which contradicted (Davis) Phillips' assertions that she was unaware. Further, we believe that every member of the SLT, as organizational leaders, was responsible to take steps to become aware of and immediately address any spiritual abuse, deception, retaliation, or other forms of trauma that took place at RZIM.
15. (Davis) Phillips assured RZIM staff they would not be required to sign non-disclosure agreements upon leaving RZIM, and that those who had signed them would be released. However, Ruth Malhotra was told she had to sign a non-disclosure agreement in order to receive her severance payment. She did not sign and received no severance. Another former staff member, Carson Weitnauer, was only able to avoid signing a non-disclosure agreement after nearly three months of difficult legal negotiations. This occurred long after (Davis) Phillips' assurance that non-disclosure agreements would no longer be required.<sup>12</sup>
16. Several former RZIM employees remain in therapy today because of the trauma caused by the actions of the SLT. RZIM initially paid the costs of counseling for employees but that has stopped. There has been no effort to cover continued costs of therapy, adding to the ongoing burden of these former employees.

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<sup>12</sup> Crary, David. [Layoffs, upheaval at Zacharias ministry roiled by scandal](#). AP News. March 10, 2021.

17. Though our focus has been on RZIM's SLT, we believe that the RZIM Executive Committee of the Board egregiously failed in its duties. Not only did it fail to hold Zacharias accountable, it did not even look at the evidence in the Thompson matter prior to signing off on Zacharias' statement of denial. We believe it failed in its fiduciary duty to Zacharias, RZIM, their donors and to the public. The Guidepost Solutions report details the specific aspects.<sup>13</sup> We have not observed the signs of repentance from former or present RZIM Executive Committee members that would be appropriate in light of the extensive damage caused by their negligence. As an example, even though the Ken Sande report concluded that abuse occurred under RZIM's roof, the Executive Committee has never acknowledged the hurt caused or to even offer the bare minimum of restitution such as payment of counseling costs.
18. Multiple former RZIM employees consider themselves to have been spiritually abused by Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips, and Murray. In addition, these employees strongly believe that all three are disqualified from ministry and leadership positions.

## Conclusion

Our determination is that Michael Ramsden, Sarah (Davis) Phillips, and Abdu Murray have not displayed a godly sorrow nor demonstrated the fruit consistent with repentance for their actions. They have acknowledged that "mistakes were made" but have not specifically owned their actions or expressed remorse to those they hurt. Nor have they repaired the damage they have caused. To his credit, Murray has made some efforts toward reconciling with a couple of former employees since we first confronted him more than a year ago. But we assess that his efforts to date fall short of the biblical requirements for Christian leaders. Rather than providing a transparent accounting of their behavior, Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips, and Murray have excused or minimized their roles in various ways. But documentation and testimony have repeatedly rebutted claims they have made, either directly to us or in public arenas.

Rather, there seems to be a prevailing sentiment amongst Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips, and Murray that they are "victims" of those who went public with their concerns. We conclude to the contrary that they who went public showed courage and bravery in the face of immense pressure and intimidation from their leaders and who by all appearances suffered loss of income, relationships, and reputation. We commend them for doing so.

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<sup>13</sup> Silliman, Daniel. [RZIM Spent nearly \\$1 Million Suing Ravi Zacharias Abuse Victim](#). *Christianity Today*. February 23, 2022.

Therefore, we believe that, as things currently stand, Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips, and Murray are not fit to be in ministry and leadership positions. We will not partner with them or endorse their work until the fruit consistent with genuine repentance is evident in their lives.

Dr. Philip Monroe, a highly regarded authority in this area, provides three specific categories of repentance in his article *Abusers and True Repentance*<sup>14</sup>: honest admission, sacrificial efforts to repair, and both accepting and flourishing under discipline. Our hope is that in light of this report, Ramsden, (Davis) Phillips, and Murray will consider Dr. Monroe's wisdom, seek counseling with someone skilled in the area of spiritual abuse, and move forward in genuine repentance. We desire to see each of these individuals demonstrate a wholehearted commitment in each of these areas.

It grieves us to come to this conclusion as we have relationships with some of these individuals spanning decades. However, we take seriously Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words in *Life Together*, "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin."<sup>15</sup>

Paul Copan, Ph.D.

William Lane Craig, Ph.D.

Debbie Licon

Michael Licon, Ph.D.

Sean McDowell, Ph.D.

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<sup>14</sup> Monroe, Phillip. G *Abusers and True Repentance*. Christian Counseling Today. Vol. 13. No. 3. 2005.

<sup>15</sup> As quoted in the Ken Sande investigation of Judy Dabler. Part 2. p. 9.