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Anti-Israel Remark Costs Teacher His Job

MIAMI BEACH – A non-Jewish teacher at a private Jewish school is losing his job for posting anti-Israel remarks on a pro-Palestinian Web site from his home computer.

Michael Lopez-Calderon, 40, was in his fifth year teaching social studies and economics at Hebrew Academy's Rabbi Alexander S. Gross High School when he was asked March 2 to take paid leave because of his remarks on the Web site hosted by Palestine Media Watch.

Beyond that, the "pro-Israel, pro-peace" Orthodox Jewish school, with almost 500 students, will not renew his \$31,000 contract next fall, school president Adrian Muller told The Miami Herald for an article in Friday's editions.

Lopez-Calderon said he regrets his statements, calling them "self-righteous, and a bit much."

Still, his views – which both sides agree Lopez-Calderon kept out of the classroom – were not the problem, school officials said.

"Rather, it was his extremely bad judgment," Muller said. He said his views "could have jeopardized his students by targeting the school."

The Web site's organizers have launched a petition drive to support the teacher and are protesting online.

Lopez-Calderon, a non-Jewish Cuban-American who believes Israel is oppressing the Palestinians, said the trouble began when he heard other teachers make what he felt were callous comments on the fatal shooting of a Palestinian teen-ager.

"It broke me," he said.

He said he expressed his outrage on the Web, supporting a Palestinian who on Feb. 14 drove his bus into a crowd of Israelis, killing seven soldiers and one civilian.