

**LETTER FROM 35 ORGANIZATIONS TO VASSAR COLLEGE PRESIDENT HILL RE:
SWASTIKAS AND UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO ESCALATING ANTI-SEMITISM**

May 12, 2016

VIA EMAIL

Dear President Hill,

We are 35 Jewish and civil rights organizations representing hundreds of thousands of supporters who are concerned for the safety and well-being of Jewish students on your campus. Last week, several Jewish students on your campus approached us and asked for our help. They reported a disturbing escalation in anti-Jewish hostility that has not been adequately addressed by campus administrators.

The students told us that this semester, in the midst of a protracted and virulently anti-Zionist Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign, a number of anti-Semitic incidents occurred which have caused them to feel singularly vulnerable and threatened. For example:

- Two swastikas were found on campus, one in February and one in April. After the first swastika appeared, the college did not formally acknowledge its presence to the campus community at all, opting instead for an email exclusively to residents of the house where the swastika was found. There was a community-wide email regarding the April incident, but students had to access a link to find out that a swastika had been drawn on a sign on a student's door.
- Jewish students were openly mocked and vilified during a BDS vote on March 6. One Jewish student, who was crying as she spoke, said that the BDS campaign had invoked every anxiety nightmare she had ever had, and pro-BDS students jeered at her. Another Jewish student spoke about Israel's founding in the wake of the Holocaust and was immediately accused of using the Holocaust as a political tool to justify the "genocide" of another people.
- In the run-up to the March BDS vote, blatantly anti-Semitic statements were posted on the Vassar YikYak. These included postings such as "f*ck Jews" and "Zionism is a plague of mankind."
- In February, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at Vassar [advertised](#) in a Facebook post that they would be selling t-shirts with an image of convicted Palestinian terrorist Leila Khaled holding a gun with the caption "Resistance is not Terrorism." The message of the SJP Vassar Facebook post stated, "Check out our

friends at Existence is Resistance!!! They will be selling sweet fucking antiZionist gear at our events. 100% of profits goes towards organizing Palestinian resistance #ExistenceisResistance”.

The Vassar students with whom we spoke were deeply disappointed that you did not publicly acknowledge the anti-Semitic nature of these incidents and commit your administration to addressing the extremely hostile environment facing many Jewish students, who are reporting feeling harassed, intimidated and unsafe on your campus.

It is not surprising that these incidents occurred during the BDS campaign at Vassar. As you may know, there is a well-documented relationship between anti-Zionist activity and acts of anti-Semitism on college campuses. At schools where BDS campaigns are promoted, Jewish students have routinely reported being harassed, physically and verbally assaulted, threatened, vilified, and discriminated against. Jewish students' property and the property of Jewish student organizations have been defaced, damaged, or destroyed, while Jewish student events have been disrupted and shut down. A recent empirical [study](#) provided objective confirmation of these student reports of widespread anti-Semitism, and discovered that BDS activity is the strongest predictor of anti-Jewish hostility on campus.

We understand that your administration has publicly advised Vassar alumnae/i that it does not support BDS, and that prior to the recent student government vote on BDS resolutions, the administration had indicated that the student government faced possible defunding if it passed measures implementing a boycott. We thank you for these actions, but as they do not explicitly recognize and address the anti-Semitic aspects of the BDS movement head on, they will not change the hostile atmosphere that many Jewish students are experiencing. Similarly, while we are also aware that you have welcomed to Vassar more diverse speakers on the Israel/Palestinian conflict, these events are inadequate by themselves to alter the campus dynamics in which (among other things) Israel is regularly portrayed by vocal faculty and department-sponsored guests as an oppressive and apartheid state, and Jewish students who openly support Israel are tarred as racists.

Faced with a rash of incidents of anti-Jewish discrimination on UC campuses very similar to the incidents occurring at Vassar College, the University of California Regents recently adopted a landmark report that explicitly recognized that contemporary forms of anti-Semitism often occur in the guise of anti-Israel activism. Specifically, the Regents condemned “anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic forms of anti-Zionism and other forms of discrimination” and stated “they have no place at the University of California.” The report further explained that “manifestations of anti-Semitism have changed” and “expressions of anti-Semitism are more coded and difficult to identify. In particular, opposition to Zionism often is expressed in ways that are not simply statements of disagreement over politics and policy, but also assertions of prejudice and intolerance toward Jewish people and culture.”

We encourage you to take the following steps to deter future acts of anti-Jewish bigotry and demonstrate unequivocally your commitment to protecting Jewish students and all students on your campus:

- 1 . Adopt a definition of anti-Semitism that identifies all forms of anti-Jewish bigotry, including when criticism of Israel crosses the line into anti-Semitism.
- 2 . Swiftly, forcefully and **publicly** acknowledge and condemn all acts of anti-Semitism.
- 3 . Commit to training campus administrators and staff involved in discrimination prevention, student affairs, and equity, diversity and inclusion, to identify contemporary anti-Semitic behavior, and direct them to develop clear protocols for addressing campus anti-Semitism with the same promptness and vigor as they do other forms of racial, ethnic, and gender bigotry and discrimination.
- 4 . Allocate resources and publicly commit to educating students about anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish discrimination.

Taking these steps will show your students, their parents, alumnae/i, and the larger community that Vassar College stands firmly against bigotry and hatred, including anti-Semitism, and will protect all members of the campus community.

Thank you for your leadership on this matter of such vital importance to members and supporters of the Jewish community.

Sincerely,

Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)
Alums for Campus Fairness
AMCHA Initiative
AMCHA UCLA Alumni
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
American Institute for Jewish Research
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources
Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Club Z
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA)
CUFI on Campus
Davis Faculty for Israel
Eagles Wings
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Fairness to Israel

Fuel For Truth
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Iranian American Jewish Federation
Israeli-American Council (IAC)
Jerusalem U
National Conference on Jewish Affairs
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Project Genesis
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Sigma Alpha Epsilon Pi
StandWithUs
Stop BDS on Campus
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism
The Israel Christian Nexus
The Israel Group
The Israel Institute
Training and Education About the Middle East (T.E.A.M.)
Zionist Organization of America

Cc: Christopher Rollke, Dean of the College
David D.B. Brown, Dean of Students
William Plapinger, Chairman of the Board of Trustees