

Letter to Columbia President Bollinger

65 Groups Call for Equal Protection for All Students at Columbia University

May 15, 2018

Dear President Bollinger,

We are 65 education and civil rights organizations who are writing to express our deep concern about the extraordinarily hostile climate for Jewish and pro-Israel students at Columbia University, and to offer a recommendation for addressing the problem in a way that we believe will benefit all students on your campus.

Over one month ago the CU chapter of Students Supporting Israel (SSI) submitted an [incident report](#) to the University's Student Governing Board (SGB). In their report, the SSI students provided considerable and compelling evidence that anti-Zionist student groups, particularly the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), have systematically harassed and silenced SSI members and other pro-Israel voices on campus, in apparent violation of university policy and New York state law.

We are impressed with the thoroughness of the SSI's incident report and its focus on the unacceptable peer-on-peer harassment that impinges on the rights of Jewish and pro-Israel students to express themselves and fully participate in campus life. We are disappointed that, to date, neither the SGB nor school administrators associated with that student board have addressed the report's concerns at all.

It is important to point out that the anti-Zionist sentiment that lies at the heart of the harassment documented in the SSI complaint grows out of an ideology whose primary goal on campus is to suppress any and all pro-Israel views. On many college campuses, anti-Zionist sentiment translates into actions that target Jewish and pro-Israel students for harm, including the shutting down or disrupting of pro-Israel events; the vilification and harassment of Jewish and pro-Israel students in order to delegitimize their Zionist perspective or cause them to be too afraid or uncomfortable to express it; and the malevolent manipulation of student government procedure in order to eliminate pro-Israel voices.

Studies [demonstrate](#) that on campuses where there is anti-Zionist activity, such as the kind witnessed at Columbia and Barnard during the recent anti-Israel divestment campaigns, Jewish and pro-Israel students are about three times more likely to be targeted for harm. At schools with active anti-Zionist student groups, these acts of aggression are seven to eight times more likely to occur.

Now is the time for your administration to take steps to ensure that all Columbia students -- including those who identify as Zionists because of their religious belief, ethnic identity, national origin, or political persuasion -- are free to express their opinions, beliefs and identities and to fully participate in campus life.

We commend Columbia University for adopting an excellent [statement](#) affirming the vital importance of freedom of expression and the University's commitment to promoting and not stifling it. However, students'

freedom of expression cannot be guaranteed unless and until students are secure in the knowledge that they are equally protected from the peer-on-peer harassment that would deprive them of that freedom. If students feel that school administrators address peer-on-peer harassment subjectively or with a double standard – responding promptly and vigorously when harassment is directed against some students but ignoring or downplaying similar behavior directed at others -- it creates a sense of inequity and increased vulnerability, which in turn can lead to further suppression of students' willingness to freely express themselves.

We therefore urge you to issue a campus-wide statement assuring all students that they will be equally protected from peer-on-peer harassment that violates their rights to freedom of expression and full participation in campus life. To be effective, the statement should include a description of all University policies and state and federal laws that prohibit harassment and discrimination, along with a firm commitment to their equitable enforcement for all students, regardless identity, opinion or legally protected status.

Thank you for considering our recommendation and for your leadership and defense of the freedoms and rights of all students at Columbia University.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned 65 Organizations:

Academic Council for Israel
Accuracy in Academia
Aggies for Israel
Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi) - National
AEPi Columbia University
Alums for Campus Fairness - National
Alums for Campus Fairness - Columbia University
Alums for Campus Fairness - New York University
Alums for Campus Fairness - Swarthmore
Alums for Campus Fairness - Syracuse University
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Davis
Alums for Campus Fairness - UCLA
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Riverside
AMCHA Initiative
American Institute for Jewish Research
American Jewish International Relations Institute
American Truth Project
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources
Campus Anti-Semitism Task Force of the North Shore
Chabad Graduate Initiative of Columbia University
Chabad Rohr House at Columbia University
Christians and Jews United for Israel
Christians United for Israel Action Fund
Club Z
Coalition for Jewish Values
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA)
Communities for Israel

Davis Faculty for Israel
Eagles Wings
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Hasbara Fellowships
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Iranian American Jewish Federation
Iranian Jewish Women's Organization
Israel-American Coalition for Action
Israel in NYC
Israel Matters
Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)
JAM - UCSB
Jerusalem U
Jewish Israel Cafe
Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA)
Middle East Forum
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
National Conference on Jewish Affairs
National Council of Young Israel
NH4Israel
NCSY
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel
Russian Jewish Community Foundation
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Simon Wiesenthal Center
Stop BDS on Campus
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism
Students Supporting Israel National
Students Supporting Israel at Columbia
Students Supporting Israel at UCLA
Students Supporting Israel at UC Irvine
Students Supporting Israel at UC Santa Barbara
The Israel Christian Nexus
Training and Education About the Middle East (T.E.A.M.)
Zionist Organization of America
ZOA's Fuel for Truth

Cc: Provost John Coatsworth
Executive Vice President Suzanne Goldberg, Office of University Life
Trustee Chair Jonathan D. Schiller