

84 organizations request clarification from UMass Faculty Senate

SENT VIA EMAIL

November 5, 2019

Dear Chancellor Subbaswamy,

We are 84 civil rights, education, religious, faculty and student organizations, writing to express both appreciation and concern.

Many of our organizations [wrote](#) to you last April about a politically motivated and directed event, “Not Backing Down: Israel, Free Speech, & the Battle for Palestinian Rights,” that, to our dismay, was being co-sponsored by several UMass departments. As we stated in our previous letter, our concern did not relate to whether the event could or should be held. We fully appreciate and respect that the First Amendment protects all speech, even speech we find offensive. We were, however, highly concerned that official UMass departments were sponsoring an event that aimed to promote a purely political cause and encourage political action. We asked you to provide us with assurances that UMass faculty “will not be permitted to use their academic position or the university’s name or resources to promote a personal, political agenda that compromises the university’s academic mission and imperils the safety and well-being of UMass students.” We were grateful that soon after, you informed the academic sponsors of the event that they have a “special obligation” to ensure that in “today’s hyper-polarized environment” this highly controversial event does not become an “echo chamber.”

In addition, we were pleased to learn that in the wake of the event last spring, the Rules Committee of the UMass Faculty Senate was directed to establish an ad hoc committee for developing guidelines regarding the departmental sponsorship of events. In a special [report](#) on the matter, the Rules Committee noted the need for “shared understandings across campus about the meaning and implications of event sponsorship [that arise] from the current context of polarization of debate on many issues in the wider national arena.” The report states that the ad hoc committee’s charge is to “explore the terrain around hosting, sponsoring, and co-sponsoring events and to clarify the various issues that arise when the campus or units within host, sponsor, or co-sponsor an event held on or off campus.” The ad hoc committee is also charged with providing guidelines “that the Faculty Senate can recommend for departments, academic units, and the university as a whole about the meanings and

implications of hosting or otherwise sponsoring or co-sponsoring events on or off campus."

We also greatly appreciated the strong statement you recently made condemning the "one-dimensional, polarizing" nature of an upcoming event on your campus, "The Attack on BDS and American Democracy." While acknowledging the First Amendment right of an outside non-profit organization, Media Education Foundation, to rent space from the University in order to host what is clearly a pro-BDS event, you commendably exercised your own right to speak out about the harmful impact of BDS and how an academic boycott of Israel, in particular, suppresses the academic freedom that is so essential to the University's mission.

These are very positive developments. However, we remain concerned that even with your excellent statement and the Faculty Senate's commitment to grappling with the parameters of departmentally-sponsored events, the underlying problem — faculty who feel entitled to use their academic positions and the university's name or resources to promote their own personal political agenda, thereby undermining the academic mission of the university and fostering political, ethnic or religious hatred on your campus — will not be adequately addressed.

Indeed, last week over 120 UMass faculty, a large majority of them members of the Faculty Senate, sent you a letter condemning your statement about the upcoming BDS event and suggesting that faculty have the right to use the university's name and resources to champion their political causes, including support for BDS and an academic boycott of Israel that tramples on the academic freedom and educational opportunities of their own students and colleagues. Not surprisingly, at least a quarter of the signatories of the letter have expressed public support for an academic boycott of Israel or other forms of BDS, including the professor who directs the UMass Resistance Studies Initiative, which is listed as a co-presenter of the upcoming BDS-promoting event.

We therefore urge you to **ask the Faculty Senate, as they are considering the issue of departmentally-sponsored events, to forthrightly address the question of whether UMass faculty and departments should be permitted to use the name and resources of the university to promote an activist political agenda. Specifically, is this a legitimate use of academic freedom, or an abuse of it?** University stakeholders, including tuition and tax payers, state legislators and the concerned public, are eager to know the answer to this question.

Thank you for your consideration,

Academic Council for Israel
Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)
Alums for Campus Fairness - National
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Davis
Alums for Campus Fairness - UC Riverside
Alums for Campus Fairness - UCLA
AMCHA Initiative
America Israel Cooperative Enterprise
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
American Institute for Jewish Research
American Truth Project
American Values
Americans Fighting Antisemitism
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
B'nai B'rith International
BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources
Bnai Zion Foundation
Bobcats for Israel at Ohio University
Boston Israel Action Committee
Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Bulldogs for Israel (Brooklyn College)
California Association of Scholars
Campus Anti-Semitism Task Force of the North Shore
Center for Combating Antisemitism
Center for Righteousness and Integrity
Christians and Jews United for Israel
Club Z
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA)
Conference of Jewish Affairs
Dartmouth Students for Israel
Davis Faculty for Israel
Eagles Wings
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)
Fuel For Truth
Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors
Hasbara Fellowships
Herut North America, U.S. Division
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Iranian American Jewish Federation

Iranian Jewish Women's Organization
Israel in NYC
Israel Matters
Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)
Israeli-American Civic Action Network
Israeli-American Civic Education Institute
Israeli-American Coalition for Action
Israeli-American Council (IAC)
Jewish American Affairs Committee of Indiana
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA)
Librarians for Fairness
Middle East Forum
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel
National Council of Young Israel
NCSY
NH4Israel
North Carolina Coalition for Israel
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Rabbinical Alliance of America
Religious Zionists of America
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel
Russian Jewish Community Foundation
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Simon Wiesenthal Center
StandWithUs
StandWithUs Saidoff Legal Department
Stop Anti-Semitism Now
Stop BDS on Campus
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism
Students Supporting Israel at Columbia
Students Supporting Israel at Drake University
Students Supporting Israel at UCLA
Students Supporting Israel National
Swarthmore Alumni Against Antisemitism on Campus
The Israel Christian Nexus
The Lawfare Project
Tufts Friends of Israel
WoMen Fight Antisemitism

World Jewish Congress, American Section
Young Jewish Conservatives
Zachor Legal Institute
Zionist Organization of America

Cc: University of Massachusetts President, Marty Meehan
Chair Commonwealth of Massachusetts Joint Committee on Higher Education,
Anne M. Gobi
Chair Commonwealth of Massachusetts Joint Committee on Higher Education,
Jeffrey N. Roy