

## 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