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March 2023

Open Letter to President Bollinger and President-Designate Shafik Regarding a Possible Global Center in Israel

Open Letter to President Bollinger and President-Designate Shafik:

We understand that Columbia University is considering opening a new Global Center in Israel. This expansion of Columbia's network of Global Centers raises significant issues relating to academic freedom, the university's compliance with U.S. non-discrimination law when operating internationally, and the role of a university in global politics. As members of the Columbia faculty, we ask that you provide meaningful responses to the concerns enumerated in the attached Bill of Particulars before proceeding further with this Center.

Signed,

- Marianne Hirsch, William Peterfeld Trent Professor Emerita, English and Comparative Literature, Institute for the Study of Sexuality and Gender
- Yinon Cohen, Yosef H. Yerushalmi Professor of Israel and Jewish Studies, Department of Sociology
- Barbara J. Fields, Professor of History, Department of History
- James Schamus, Professor of Professional Practice, School of the Arts
- Shelly Silver, Professor, Visual Arts, School of the Arts
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- Wael Hallaq, Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies
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- Celia E. Naylor, Professor of Africana Studies and History, Department of Africana Studies, Barnard College
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- Zainab Bahrani, Edith Porada Professor of Art History and Archaeology, Department of Art History & Archaeology
- Vani Natarajan, Departmental and Program Librarian for the Humanities and Global Studies, Barnard College
- Nick Bartlett, Assistant Professor, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures and Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
- Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies, Department of History
- Gregory Mann, Professor of History, Department of History
- Jeffrey Fagan, Professor of Law, School of Law
- Susan Bernofsky, Professor of Writing and Director, Literary Translation at Columbia, School of Arts
- Gregory M. Pflugfelder, Associate Professor, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
- Victoria de Grazia, Moore Collegiate Professor of History, Emerita, Department of History
- Nadia Abu El-Haj, Ann Whitney Olin Professor, Department of Anthropology
- George Saliba, Professor Emeritus, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies
- Gauri Viswanathan, Class of 1933 Professor in the Humanities, Department of English and Comparative Literature
- Sailakshmi Ramgopal, Assistant Professor, Department of History
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- D. Max Moerman, Professor and Chair, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures, Barnard College
- Bruce Robbins, Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities, Department of English and Comparative Literature
- Nico Baumbach, Associate Professor, School of Arts
- Natasha Lightfoot, Associate Professor, History, Department of History
- Jennifer Wenzel, Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature; Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies
- Zoe Crossland, Professor of Anthropology, Columbia Anthropology Department
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- Jonathan Crary, Meyer Schapiro Professor of Modern Art and Theory, Department of Art History and Archaeology
- Brent Hayes Edwards, Peng Family Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Department of English and Comparative Literature
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- Susan S. Witte, Professor, School of Social Work
- Gray Tuttle, Lelia Hadley Luce Professor of Modern Tibet, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
- Louisa Gilbert, Professor, School of Social Work
- Elwin Wu, Professor, School of Social Work

- Nabila El-Bassel, Professor, School of Social Work
- Louisa Gilbert, Professor, School of Social Work
- Alexander Alberro, Professor, Department of Art History and Archaeology
- Alissa Davis, Associate Professor, School of Social Work
- Marc Van De Mieroop, Professor of History, Department of History
- Martha Howell, Miriam Champion Professor, Emerita, of History, Department of History
- Gil Eyal, Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology
- Brian Boyd, Senior Lecturer & Director of Museum Anthropology, Department of Anthropology
- Avinoam Shalem, Riggio Professor Arts of Islam, Department of Art History and Archaeology
- Timothy Mitchell, Professor, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies
- Felicity Scott, Professor, School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
- Yannik Thiem, Associate Professor of Religion, Department of Religion
- Walter Frisch, Professor of Music, Department of Music
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- Najam Haider, Professor of Religion and Chair, Barnard College
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- J. Blake Turner, Assistant Professor of Clinical Social Science, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry
- Katherine Franke, James L. Dohr Professor of Law, School of Law
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- Deborah Paredez, Associate Professor of Professional Practice, School of the Arts
- Marwa Elshakry, Associate Professor of History, Department of History
- Thea Abu El-Haj, Professor, Department of Education, Barnard College
- Ann Douglas, Professor Emeritus
- Manan Ahmed, Associate Professor, Department of History
- Amy Chazkel, Associate Professor, Department of History
- Seth J. Prins, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health

Bill of Particulars

Relating to a Possible

Columbia University Global Center in Israel

March 2023

Preamble:

With the understanding that President Bollinger and Columbia University's Board of Trustees have taken significant steps toward the creation of a Global Center in Israel, serious concerns related thereto have arisen among a range of persons and entities affiliated with Columbia University. While Columbia's faculty and students support the overall mission of the Global Centers' programs to "promote and facilitate the collaborative and impactful engagement of the University's faculty, students, and alumni with the world, to enhance understanding, address global challenges, and advance knowledge and its exchange," many members of the Columbia community believe that "the objective of connecting the local with the global, to create opportunities for shared learning and to deepen the nature of global dialogue," would not be furthered. Indeed, those objectives would be undermined by the creation of a Global Center in Israel.

There is already a Columbia Global Center well-established in the region, only 70 miles/111 kilometers from Tel Aviv. If the idea behind establishing a global center is to establish a point of intellectual connectivity in a specific region, the Amman Center already fulfills that role. A center in Tel Aviv will not be able to replicate it. At the same time, the state of Israel, through formal and informal law, policy, and practice, refuses to abide by international human rights laws and norms both domestically and in its treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

What follows is a set of fundamental questions related to the potential establishment of a Columbia Global Center in Israel. These questions concern the ways such a Center would undermine the mission of Columbia's Global Centers programs through its violations of university and official U.S. policies of non-discrimination in education and the protection of freedom of expression.

1. We are particularly concerned that Columbia University would take the bold step of opening a Global Center in Tel Aviv at this particular moment, with the newly seated government that is widely, if not almost universally, regarded as the most conservative, reactionary, right wing government in Israel's history. It will be impossible for the University to announce the establishment of this new Global Center and avoid creating the impression that it is endorsing or legitimizing the new government.

2. How can Columbia University establish a Global Center in a state that will ban entry to many current and future faculty and students on the basis of their national, ethnic, or religious identity? As a matter of policy, the state of Israel bans entry to citizens of Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Iran, and Iraq, as well as the vast majority of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It is worth noting that the decision to approve a Global Center in Amman relied, to a significant degree, on the fact that the state of Jordan would not bar entry to nationals from other countries, including Israel. Columbia University would not have established a Global Center in a country that denied entry to Israelis; similarly, it should not establish a significant institutional footprint in country that routinely bans entry to Arabs, including Palestinians, and Muslims. There are already multiple examples across a range of Columbia departments of graduate students denied entry to Israel and the Occupied Territories because of the students' ethnic or national identity. This includes U.S. citizens of Arab origin.

3. How can Columbia University establish a Global Center in a state that will ban entry to many Columbia faculty and students on account of their political speech and research? It is well known that Columbia faculty, while traveling on university business, have been denied entry to the state of Israel, deported, and banned from reentry on account of their political speech critical of Israel's human rights record. Given that an Israeli court has upheld the domestic law that

authorizes a denial of entry to Israel for political reasons, there is no doubt that many Columbia faculty and students will be banned from entering Israel to visit and/or use a Columbia Global Center. Moreover, Israeli immigration officials rely on privately maintained and slanderous blacklists to determine eligibility for entry to Israel at the border, and hundreds of Columbia faculty and students are named on such lists. In at least one case, records of such a denial of entry were passed on to US Immigration and served as the basis for a false claim that the faculty member in question had a “criminal record.”

4. How can a Tel Aviv center operate as a *Global* Center when events held there cannot include scholars, students, speakers, or other participants who come from banned countries? One of the stated missions of the Global Centers program is “to drive teaching and research across disciplinary boundaries, in partnership with experts and scholars from their regions.” This would be impossible in Tel Aviv since most regional scholars, including those in the nearby Occupied Palestinian Territories, would be prohibited from entering. Recent Israeli policies have extended to the denial of visas and refusal of entry even to U.S. nationals of Palestinian origin who hold teaching positions at Palestinian universities.

5. What topics, in addition to which persons, will be banned from discussion at a Columbia Global Center in Israel? Israeli policy directly and indirectly censors discussion of certain topics, by direct “withdrawal of funding” by the Ministry of Culture of Israel, for example, and/or ex ante categorizes them as illegitimate topics for robust discussion, even in an academic setting.

6. How would a Columbia Global Center in Israel comply with the University’s clear policy that it is “committed to providing a learning, living, and working environment free from unlawful discrimination and harassment and to fostering a nurturing and vibrant community founded upon the fundamental dignity and worth of all of its members,” especially since this policy “governs the conduct of all Columbia University students, faculty, staff and visitors that occurs on the University’s campuses or in connection with University-sponsored programs”? Of course, the University can anticipate that there may be incidents of discrimination in violation of its clear policies that occur in any of its campuses or Global Centers, including in the United States. Yet, with respect to a possible Global Center in Israel, violations of the University’s Non-Discrimination Policy would be baked into the Center itself, thus establishing a structural exemption from compliance with otherwise universally applicable principles. Not only would a possible Global Center in Tel Aviv discriminate against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of their national origin/religion, but the new government has gone on record supporting affirmatively homophobic, racist, and sexist positions, particularly in academic settings.

7. Similar to item 6 above, how would Columbia University avoid violating Titles VI and IX of the Higher Education Act if it establishes a Global Center in a country that, as a matter of official government policy, would require Columbia University to discriminate against students on the basis of their sex, race, and/or national origin with regard to their access and ability to benefit from or participate in programs at a Global Center in Israel? Moreover, insofar as Columbia University has a stated commitment to protecting and promoting “the fundamental dignity and worth of all of its members” in all of its programs, how can the University avoid undermining the fundamental dignity and worth of many members of our community if it establishes a Global Center in a country whose laws and policies have been widely described as discriminatory, if not apartheid in nature, as is evidenced by the Nation-State Law passed by the Knesset in July 2018, and the radical reforms rolled out by the new Israeli government?

8. There is wide concern that principles of faculty governance and the expectation of leadership, oversight, and consultation with regional experts for programming at the Global Centers have not been followed in the case of planning, preparation, or setting of priorities for a possible Global Center in Israel. There is also substantial concern about the power of donor money to direct major decisions, such as the establishment of this Global Center in Tel Aviv, in lieu of consultation with the faculty. Decisions about establishing Global Centers should be subject to the same procedures of faculty governance as are all major decisions about academic programs at Columbia. Global Centers should in general, like academic departments and institutes at Columbia, be subject to regular academic reviews.