

Executive Council of Australian Jewry Inc.

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יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative Organisation of Australian Jewry

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Professor Gerard Sutton
Chair
Universities Australia
GPO Box 1142
Canberra ACT 2601
20 June 2007

Dear Professor Sutton

You and your colleagues undoubtedly are aware of the efforts of the British University and College Union (UCU) to promote a boycott against Israeli academics and academic institutions as a measure to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people.

The government and people of Israel are committed to a peaceful resolution of this longstanding dispute and have the support of Australian Jewish community. There have been many attempts to further this process, not least Israel's handing over of Gaza to Palestinian rule in 2005, but to no avail.

That these efforts to promote peace have been rejected is one reason why Australian Jews are outraged by the UCU's resolution, as are numerous individuals and institutions world-wide. But even more to the point, the UCU's call is simply both immoral and counter-productive. As Professor Malcolm Grant, Chairman of the Russell Group of the UK's research-intensive universities and President and Provost of UCL, said: "We reject outright the call for an academic boycott. It is a contradiction in terms and in direct conflict with the mission of a university. It betrays a misunderstanding of the academic mission which is founded squarely on freedom of inquiry and freedom of speech. Any institution worthy of the title of university has the responsibility to protect these values, and it is particularly disturbing to find an academic union attacking academic freedom in this way. The Russell Group universities will uphold academic freedom by standing firm against any boycott that threatens it."

Included in the opponents to this attempted boycott are the Chancellors of Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley. Their principled statements which make the point that these threats violate the fundamental values of academic freedom and freedom of speech are attached. And both of these universities go even further, standing in solidarity with Israeli educational institutions by declaring that if a boycott goes ahead, Columbia and USC Berkeley wish to be boycotted as well.

Professor Sutton, Australian universities have long been proud protectors of academic freedom, as are their counterparts in the USA, Israel and elsewhere. Hence we request that Universities Australia ask its members to stand up against this blackmail and publicly declare their opposition to UCU's thugery.

Yours sincerely

Grahame J. Leonard
President

Cc: Professor Richard Larkins AO, Deputy Chair

Statement from UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert J. Birgeneau in response to British faculty union's proposed action against Israeli universities 14 June 2007

http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2007/06/14_israel.shtml

BERKELEY – As chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, I share the growing outrage over the efforts by some members of Britain's University and College Union to promulgate a boycott against Israeli academics and academic institutions. Their threat to cut off all funding, visits, and joint publishing with Israeli institutions violates the fundamental principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech that are the hallmarks of great universities nationally and internationally. We hold these values most deeply at Berkeley, the birthplace of the Free Speech Movement.

I join in solidarity with President Lee Bollinger of Columbia University in support of Israeli scholars and institutions, and I join him in saying this to those members of the British UCU who would pursue this reprehensible action: if you seek to isolate Israeli universities then you must also include Berkeley, along with Columbia, in your boycott. We stand with all — including Prime Minister Tony Blair and British higher education officials — who have rightfully and strongly condemned this effort.

Robert J. Birgeneau
Chancellor

Statement by President Lee C. Bollinger on British University and College Union Boycott Published: June 12, 2007

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/07/06/boycott.html>

As a citizen, I am profoundly disturbed by the recent vote by Britain's new University and College Union to advance a boycott against Israeli academic institutions. As a university professor and president, I find this idea utterly antithetical to the fundamental values of the academy, where we will not hold intellectual exchange hostage to the political disagreements of the moment. In seeking to quarantine Israeli universities and scholars this vote threatens every university committed to fostering scholarly and cultural exchanges that lead to enlightenment, empathy, and a much-needed international marketplace of ideas.

At Columbia I am proud to say that we embrace Israeli scholars and universities that the UCU is now all too eager to isolate -- as we embrace scholars from many countries regardless of divergent views on their governments' policies. Therefore, if the British UCU is intent on pursuing its deeply misguided policy, then it should add Columbia to its boycott list, for we do not intend to draw distinctions between our mission and that of the universities you are seeking to punish. Boycott us, then, for we gladly stand together with our many colleagues in British, American and Israeli universities against such intellectually shoddy and politically biased attempts to hijack the central mission of higher education.