



November 13, 2019

VIA EMAIL

Martin T. Meehan, President
University of Massachusetts
Office of the President
1 Beacon Street, 31st Floor
Boston, MA 02108

Dear President Meehan:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the oldest and one of the largest pro-Israel organizations in the U.S., whose mission includes fighting anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism on college campuses.

We are deeply concerned that a University of Massachusetts (UMass) chancellor, Kumble Subbaswamy of UMass Amherst, is under undeserved pressure to retract a [statement](#) he issued last month, which condemned the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. Chancellor Subbaswamy issued the statement in advance of a pro-BDS event at UMass Amherst entitled “Criminalizing Dissent: The Attack on BDS and American Democracy.” A private outside foundation rented space on campus to host the event, which took place yesterday.

In his October 21 statement, Chancellor Subbaswamy correctly condemned yesterday’s event as “one-dimensional” and “polarizing,” noting that it “fails to acknowledge the humanity on the Israeli side of the conflict.” The Chancellor wrote, “A panel discussion where only one perspective is shared does little to increase the understanding of such a complex topic like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Chancellor Subbaswamy also correctly recognized the harmful impact of the anti-Israel BDS event. Many consider it anti-Semitic and alienating to Jewish and other members of the campus community, he appropriately stated.

Importantly, Chancellor Subbaswamy condemned academic boycotts generally, correctly stating that they “are antithetical to academic freedom.” The Chancellor pointed out the irony that BDS supporters rely on academic freedom to promote their views, yet seek to suppress academic freedom by shutting down pro-Israel speakers and voices.

After Chancellor Subbaswamy issued his statement on October 21, the ZOA publicly [praised](#) him for his leadership. However, he is paying an unfair and unwarranted price for speaking the truth.

More than 40 Boston faculty members of UMass have called on Chancellor Subbaswamy to retract his statement criticizing the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic BDS movement. In their [letter](#), these faculty members wrongly claim that it is “not so self-evident” that academic boycotts are anathema to academic freedom. They absurdly compare BDS to UMass’s decision to divest of holdings in apartheid South Africa in the late 20th century. In addition, they wrongly accuse Israel of being an “apartheid state” and a “military state occupier.”

In fact, the [American Association of University Professors](#) (AAUP) has made it clear that academic boycotts *are* anathema to academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas. In particular, the AAUP opposes “selective academic boycotts that entail an ideological litmus test.” The AAUP decisively stated that “we cannot endorse the use of political or religious views as a test of eligibility for participation in the academic community.”

As for UMass faculty’s comparison of the anti-Israel BDS movement to the fight against apartheid South Africa, the AAUP rejected that, too. The AAUP distinguished the economic boycott of South Africa from academic boycotts, “which strike directly at the free exchange of ideas.”

Finally, despite the faculty members’ false and absurd description, Israel is not an “apartheid state” or a “military state occupier.” In fact, Israel is the only thriving democracy in the Middle East, where both Jews and non-Jews have equal rights under the law. Israeli Arabs serve in the Knesset and in the military. They hold government posts, and serve as judges, including on the Supreme Court. Indeed, it was an Arab judge who sentenced an Israeli president to prison.

Apartheid does exist in the region governed by the Palestinian Authority and in Gaza, which the U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas controls. Furthermore, Jews are not occupiers or interlopers; they are indigenous to the Land of Israel. As archeological evidence demonstrates, the Jewish people’s connection to their religious and ancestral homeland goes back thousands of years. BDS supporters conveniently close their eyes to the fact that Palestinian Arabs could have had a state already. They rejected three offers over the last 20 years, because that would have meant accepting the Jewish state of Israel.

It is both outrageous and telling that out of all the truly human-rights abusing countries in the world – China, Russia, North Korea, and virtually every country in the Middle East *except* Israel, just to name a few – the BDS movement targets and seeks to punish (and, as BDS leaders publicly state, to eliminate) the one and only Jewish state in the world. BDS supporters do not condemn or seek to punish the Palestinian Authority, which pays Arabs to murder Jews.

That is why the anti-Israel BDS movement is anti-Semitic. That is also why the typical claims of BDS supporters – which demonize Israel and Israelis, and deny Israel’s right to exist – are also anti-Semitic.

This is not just our view at the ZOA. Demonizing Israeli Jews, denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and singling out Israel and holding Israel to a standard to which no other country is held are among the many ways that anti-Semitism is expressed today, according to the [definition](#) of anti-Semitism that the U.S. and approximately 30 other countries around the world have adopted.

[Studies](#) show that BDS is also anti-Semitic in its effect. Schools with BDS activity are approximately three times more likely to show acts of anti-Jewish hostility such as assault, vandalism, harassment and suppression of speech. Also, schools with BDS-promoting student groups (such as the hate group that calls itself “Students for Justice in Palestine”) or faculty are six to eight times more likely to exhibit such anti-Semitic acts.

We again commend Chancellor Subbaswamy for exercising moral leadership and speaking out in opposition to the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic BDS movement and acknowledging the harmful impact it has on Jewish and other members of the campus community. He should not bow to the pressure of anti-Israel bullies by retracting his statement.

As the president and leader of UMass, you must speak out, too, and make it clear that UMass opposes the anti-Israel BDS movement.

We urge you take the following steps:

- Follow the example of the chancellors of the University of California (UC) campuses who issued a [statement](#) affirming their “long-standing opposition to an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions and/or individual scholars.” Make it clear in your statement – as the UC Chancellors did – that such a boycott threatens the academic freedom of UMass students and faculty, as well as the unfettered exchange of ideas and perspectives on the UMass campus, including debate and discourse regarding conflicts in the Middle East.
- In your statement, make it clear that the anti-Israel BDS movement is anti-Semitic, because it singles out the only Jewish state in the world for punishment, and because it can create a hostile and even unsafe learning environment for Jewish and other members of the UMass community.

UMass holds itself out as, “in every regard . . . a national model of excellence for public research universities.” Consistent with that standard, we urge you to serve as a model for other university leaders across the U.S.: Issue a forceful, unequivocal statement that UMass opposes boycotts targeting the Jewish state of Israel.

Very truly yours,



Morton A. Klein
National President



Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice