



## ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA

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May 18, 2020

### VIA EMAIL

Mr. M. Brian Blake  
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs  
George Washington University  
1918 F Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20052

Dear Provost Blake:

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. A crucial part of our mission is fighting campus anti-Semitism, including vicious anti-Israelism, which can create a hostile learning environment for Jewish students in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

As you surely know, thousands of George Washington University (GW) students and others are [urging](#) GW to reconsider its decision to name Ilana Feldman as the interim dean of the Elliott School of International Affairs. They share a well-founded concern that Dr. Feldman's appointment contributes to a hostile campus environment for Jewish and pro-Israel students.

Despite all these concerns, you have made it clear that GW is standing by its decision. In an [email](#) last Thursday, you asserted, "As vice dean, Dr. Feldman has demonstrated her leadership ability and her respect for and commitment to all students, faculty and staff of the Elliott School community."

Unfortunately, Dr. Feldman's record does not support that assessment. Her record actually shows longstanding hostility toward the Jewish state of Israel, which cannot help but adversely affect her respect for and commitment to GW students who are Jewish and pro-Israel.

For example, in her academic papers, Dr. Feldman has [glossed over](#) Arab terrorism against Jews. In 2009, she wrote a paper [demonizing](#) Israel's efforts to provide humanitarian aid to Gazans ruled by Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization. On July 18, 2014, Dr. Feldman [co-signed](#) a letter that falsely and outrageously referred to Israel's defensive operations in Gaza – which were aimed at stopping the thousands of rockets that Hamas was shooting into Israel, targeting innocent Israeli civilians, and at destroying Hamas' attack tunnels – as "the wholesale slaughter of a civilian population." In a blog post, Dr. Feldman even [demonized](#) Israel's extraordinary efforts to avoid civilian casualties in Gaza.

In addition, Dr. Feldman actively [supports](#) the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. She even advocates for [boycotting](#) Israeli academic institutions.

Singling out the one and only Jewish state in the world for condemnation and punishment – as the BDS movement does – while ignoring truly human-rights-abusing countries like China among others, is anti-Semitic. Indeed, GW President Thomas LeBlanc has expressed the university's opposition to the BDS movement, appreciating that it breeds divisiveness and causes Jewish and pro-Israel students to feel

unwelcome and even afraid for their safety. In his April 14, 2018 [statement](#) rejecting BDS, President LeBlanc wrote: “The University prioritizes the safety and security of all our students and our campus community. I encourage the GW community to foster an inclusive environment and to continue to engage in open, respectful dialogue.”

Likewise, GW has made it clear that it rejects the academic boycott against Israel that Dr. Feldman openly endorses. In a [statement](#) issued on December 27, 2013, which affirmed GW’s “culture of academic freedom,” President LeBlanc wrote: “We continue to believe that academic exchanges and conversations lead to better understanding between nations and people of differing views.” Dr. Feldman does not endorse any of these principles.

Even before Dr. Feldman’s appointment, GW already had a serious anti-Semitism problem. On March 8, 2020, for example, a Jewish student [shared](#) this deeply troubling incident on Twitter: “I was attacked for being a Jew at GW this weekend. . . . I was recently followed down the street, on my campus, by a group of boys while wearing my kippah.” In February 2020, another student [reported](#), “I returned to genitalia drawn over my door, and this: A Swastika and Hitler moustache. As a proud and vocal Jew, I know this was not a coincidence. This was another attempt to stop me from expressing my views publicly, and another attempt to intimidate me into being quiet.”

Dr. Feldman’s appointment will make these already-existing problems even worse. Students who are Jewish and pro-Israel will feel even more marginalized and afraid to express their Jewish identity and support for their ancestral homeland. Intended or not, GW is sending these students and the university community a dangerous and unacceptable message – that despite committing to an inclusive and welcoming environment that values international collaboration and exchange, GW will not hesitate to place an Israel-basher and anti-Israel BDS supporter in a prominent and influential leadership position, at the expense of Jewish and pro-Israel students. Even if Dr. Feldman cannot implement an anti-Israel boycott in her new role as interim dean, it is impossible to fathom that she will encourage tolerance of pro-Israel views or encourage collaborative relationships with Israeli academic institutions and scholars.

We urge you to consider again the impact of this appointment on your students and your community. Consider GW’s legal obligation to provide Jewish students with a non-hostile learning environment, as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Please rescind Dr. Feldman’s appointment and appoint an interim dean whose record demonstrates genuine respect for and commitment to *everyone* in the GW community, including those who are Jewish and who love and support the Jewish state of Israel.

Very truly yours,



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