

9/30/2020

Dear University President:

We are 30 national organizations deeply troubled by growing antisemitism in the U.S., including on our college campuses. Many Jewish students are feeling harassed, afraid to express their Jewish identity – including their support for Israel – and afraid for their emotional well-being and physical safety. Several of us wrote to you in September 2014, because we anticipated a frightening backlash against Jews on campus due to the Hamas war against Israel in the summer of 2014. Back then, we urged you to take the necessary steps to protect your Jewish students, as you would surely do if any other vulnerable minority group on your campus was being targeted. Such steps were required under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Rising Antisemitism

Since then, the situation has worsened for Jews in the U.S. and around the world. Antisemitism has surged. In 2018, it was at “near-historic levels,” according to the Anti-Defamation League’s annual audit of antisemitic incidents. Tragically, our country suffered the single deadliest attack on the Jewish community in American history on October 27, 2018, when 11 Jews were murdered at a Pittsburgh synagogue and six other individuals were wounded.

In 2019, antisemitism “hit an all-time high,” according to the ADL, which reported a 12% increase from the previous year and horrifyingly, a 56% increase in assaults. Some of the assaults were deadly. In April 2019, a man who claimed that Jews “are trying to destroy all white people” opened fire at the Chabad of Poway, California, killing one congregant and injuring several others.

On December 10, 2019, two individuals – at least one of whom was associated with the antisemitic Black Hebrew Israelites group – stormed a kosher market in Jersey City, New Jersey, killing three. Weeks later, on December 28, an individual barged into the home of a rabbi in Monsey, New York, during a Chanukah celebration. He attacked people with a machete, killing one and injuring four. Since December, there have been a series of attacks on Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn, New York. Eight occurred during a span of eight days. Jews were assaulted physically and with antisemitic slurs. Objects were thrown at them, and several were hit or punched in the head or the face.

Disturbing Antisemitism on Campus

Antisemitism on our college campuses has been equally alarming, particularly because the antisemites are finding new ways to target and persecute Jews. There are still incidents of antisemitic vandalism on campus, with mezuzahs being ripped off of students’ doors in their residence halls, and swastikas defacing campus property. In addition, Jewish students are under siege from antisemitism related to Israel and Zionism. This form of antisemitism masquerades as legitimate political discourse, but in fact, it is yet another expression of Jew-hatred, causing Jewish students to feel harassed, threatened and even afraid for their safety.

For example, in April 2018, NYU's antisemitic hate group that calls itself "Students for Justice in Palestine" (SJP) and its allies assembled more than 50 other student groups to join them in a campaign to marginalize Jewish and pro-Israel students. In addition to pledging to boycott Israeli goods, Israeli academic institutions and conferences, and several off-campus pro-Israel groups, this coalition pledged to boycott NYU's pro-Israel student clubs by not co-sponsoring any events with them. SJP's goal could not be clearer: to marginalize and silence Jewish and pro-Israel students.

Antisemites on campus have persecuted Jewish students and questioned their fitness to serve in leadership positions simply because they are Jews – for example, at UCLA, the University of Michigan and, most recently, the University of Southern California (USC). After USC student Rose Ritch was subjected to a vicious, months-long social media campaign against her by fellow students who wanted to "get her Zionist ass," she resigned from her position as vice president for the undergraduate student government, to protect her mental health and physical safety.

Antisemitism has infiltrated the classroom – again masquerading as legitimate discourse about the Middle East. Academic departments are increasingly sponsoring events that demonize Israel, condone violence against Israel or call for the elimination of the Jewish state. Faculty advocate for and try to implement anti-Israel academic boycotts.

A 2019 "academic" conference about Gaza, co-sponsored by Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, blatantly targeted Jews. The conference featured a rapper who announced to the audience that he was going to sing "my antisemitic song" and encouraged the audience to join in. Urging them to "think of Mel Gibson – go that antisemitic – I cannot be antisemitic alone," the rapper sang the refrain, "Oh, I'm in love with a Jew." The audience – which presumably included university staff, students, faculty and "scholars" – sang along, laughing.

Campus Antisemitism Persists During this Pandemic

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has vastly changed the world, including college life. Colleges and universities have had to shift classes and other activities from in-person to virtual learning and engaging. Yet antisemitism persists. Bigots are scapegoating Jews, outrageously claiming that Jews are responsible for the virus. Jewish students are still being targeted and harassed.

Antisemitic "Zoombombing" – which describes the intentional disruption of Zoom video conferences with graphic or threatening messages – is a new manifestation of antisemitism during this pandemic. For example, during a Zoom video conference call on March 31, 2020, with Yeshiva University President Ari Berman, students and staff were subjected to a barrage of antisemitic pictures and messages, such as "hail hitler," "SHUT THE F—K UP JEWS," and "IMMA GAS YALL." At Oklahoma City University's virtual commencement ceremony in May 2020, the n-word and a swastika suddenly appeared on the screen in front of the graduates and their loved ones, causing the ceremony to be cut short.

At Florida State University, the student senate recently voted to remove the senate president after his private texts to fellow Catholic students were shared publicly and deemed to be transphobic and exclusionary. Shockingly, the senate replaced him with an unabashed antisemite. The new

senate president's social media posts include a fake photo of an Israeli soldier with the caption, "stupid Jew thinks he is cool." Another post said "f**k Israel." This student also created a website that minimizes the Holocaust, and equates Israelis with Nazis. When there was justified outcry at FSU about his antisemitism, the student was unremorseful; he doubled down on his hateful antisemitic views, and again compared Israel to Nazi Germany. Yet this individual remains the president of FSU's student senate, where he is supposed to be representing all students, including those who are Jewish and pro-Israel.

Your Unequivocal Legal Obligation to Address Antisemitic Harassment and Discrimination

Campus antisemitism is an even greater problem than it was when many of our organizations wrote to you six years ago. Now, your obligation to address these problems and ensure that they do not recur is stronger than ever.

On December 11, 2019, President Trump issued an Executive Order on Combating Anti-Semitism. The executive order reflects the U.S. government's commitment to fight this ugly hatred in the U.S. and around the world, especially on our college campuses.

The order requires that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act be enforced to protect Jews from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. It also requires federal agencies to consider the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism when they enforce Title VI. The definition appropriately identifies contemporary examples of antisemitism, including when targeting Israel may be a manifestation of the problem.

Our Recommendations

To comply with your legal – and moral – obligation to ensure that Jewish students on your campus are afforded a campus environment that is physically and psychologically safe, we urge you to take the following steps:

- Issue strong public statements to the university community, urging students, faculty and other members of the community to engage in discussion and debate in a civil, tolerant and respectful manner.
- Respond promptly to each and every antisemitic incident on campus – including those relating to Zionism and Israel – by publicly condemning the antisemitism and the perpetrators, and publicly affirming that antisemitism is intolerable and inconsistent with the university's values of civility, respect and tolerance. Use the incident as an opportunity to educate your university community about the many ways antisemitism is expressed today, using the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a frame of reference.
- Immediately and thoroughly respond to possible infractions of university rules and policies (including student-filed grievances and complaints), and hold wrongdoers accountable for their misconduct. No student or student group should be given special treatment and allowed to violate rules and policies without consequence. If a student group engages in hateful, bigoted conduct that creates a climate of fear or disrespect on

campus, then that group should not be entitled to the rights and privileges afforded to registered student groups and those rights and privileges should be revoked.

- Review your rules and policies on cyberbullying – and augment them, if necessary – to ensure that the definition of cyberbullying includes antisemitic threats, harassment and bullying, and that cyberbullies are on notice that they will face disciplinary action, including for off-campus conduct that negatively affects the learning environment on campus.
- Immediately report alleged or suspected criminal conduct (e.g., antisemitic violence, threats of violence, vandalism) to the appropriate authorities.
- Mandate training on antisemitism for administrators, faculty, security and other university personnel, using the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a guide, so that they will understand the many ways that antisemitism is expressed today, including when anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism are a mask for antisemitism,
- Mandate training on antisemitism for all students, using the IHRA antisemitism definition as a guide. Students and student groups that engage in antisemitic conduct should be supervised and appropriately mentored, and disciplined if they violate university rules and policies.
- Issue a statement to faculty informing them that they cannot use their academic positions or the university's name or resources to promote a personal, political antisemitic or anti-Israel agenda that compromises the university's academic mission or jeopardizes the physical or psychological safety and well-being of students.
- Make it clear in your statement to faculty that students must be able to express their views in class without fear of intimidation or reprisal from other students or professors.

We appreciate that college campuses should encourage free and open debate and the robust exchange of ideas. We support these principles. But none of us should tolerate a campus where students and student groups flagrantly disregard university rules and policies – supported by university funds, no less – without consequences. None of us should support faculty using their podiums to promote their personal, political anti-Israel agendas. None of us should tolerate a campus climate of fear or disrespect, which can seriously impair the physical and psychological health of students and create conditions that negatively affect their learning and their ability to achieve their full potential.

These were the words that the U.S. Department of Education used in a policy letter confirming that Jewish students have the legal right under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to a non-hostile learning environment, and that publicly-funded schools have the legal responsibility to protect them. President Trump enshrined this policy in his executive order last December. Schools that fail to comply with their obligations under Title VI risk losing their federal funding.

We are ready to work with you to ensure that the climate on your campus remains physically and emotionally safe and conducive to learning for Jewish and pro-Israel students, which is what every student deserves. Please let us hear from you and consider us a resource.

Respectfully,

Alpha Epsilon Pi
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
American Friends of Ateret Cohanim
Americans Against Antisemitism
Americans for a Safe Israel
Americans for Peace and Tolerance
Chamah
Chovevei Zion
Christians' Israel Public Action Campaign
Club Z
Coalition for Jewish Values
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA)
Conference of Jewish Affairs
Endowment for Middle East Truth
HaShevet
Hasbara Fellowships
Institute of Black Solidarity for Israel
The Lawfare Project
Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Middle East Research Center, Ltd.
National Council of Young Israel
One Israel Fund
Russian American Jewish Experience
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
StandWithUs Saidoff Legal Department
Students Supporting Israel
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
Young Jewish Conservatives
Z Street
Zionist Organization of America