



## **Responses to Britain's University and College Union's (UCU) Resolution to Consider a Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions**

### **(1) Lee Bollinger, President of Columbia University in NY, gave the following statement regarding the UCU boycott (June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007):**

*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.*

### **(2) Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME) have circulated the following petition signed by a variety of university presidents, Nobel Prize winners, and academics (June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007):**

*Please Join Us By Signing and Circulating The Following Solidarity Statement With Our Israeli Academic and Professional Colleagues*

*We are academics, scholars, researchers and professionals of differing religious and political perspectives. We all agree that singling out Israelis for an academic boycott is wrong. To show our solidarity with our Israeli academics in this matter, we, the undersigned, hereby declare ourselves to be Israeli academics for purposes of any academic boycott. We will regard ourselves as Israeli academics and decline to participate in any activity from which Israeli academics are excluded.*

### **(3) The Anti Defamation League (ADL) has sent the following letter to the UCU**

*To the British National Union of Journalists and the University and College Union:*

*We are writing to express our outrage with your recent efforts to boycott Israel. These highly politicized and blatantly biased attacks violate the basic tenets of journalistic and academic objectivity and disregard key facts of the complex Arab-Israeli conflict. Singling out Israel for boycott while ignoring the brutal human rights abuses occurring everyday in countries like Sudan, Zimbabwe and Iran isn't activism -- it's anti-Semitism.*

*These actions will harm British journalists and college and university teachers by calling into question their professionalism and their ability to report and educate on complex international situations. We urge you to reverse your outrageous decisions.*

**(4) Nobel Laureate Stephen Weinberg of the University of Texas canceled an invitation to speak at Imperial College London (May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Weinberg said:**

*"I know that some will say that these boycotts are directed only against Israel, rather than generally against Jews. But Given the history of the attacks on Israel and the oppressiveness and aggressiveness of other countries in the Middle East and elsewhere, boycotting Israel indicated a moral blindness for which it is hard to find any explanation other than anti-Semitism"*

**(5) The Anti Defamation League (ADL) took out a series of ads in major newspapers alerting the public to the "unfair and biased nature" of the UCU action:**

[http://www.adl.org/boycott/boycott\\_ads.asp](http://www.adl.org/boycott/boycott_ads.asp)

**(6) US based support groups for the seven major Israeli universities took out the following ad in response to the UCU's action:**

[http://www.juf.org/pdf/ealert/british\\_boycott.pdf](http://www.juf.org/pdf/ealert/british_boycott.pdf)

**(7) The ADL has compiled a list of statements and quotations from a variety of leading academics in response to the UCU's recent action:**

*"The boycott of Israeli universities which is being considered by the United Kingdom's University and College Union (UCU) should be thoroughly condemned. ... It would be a gross violation of the values which form the foundation, and progressive evolution, of civil society if the UCU endorsed this action. I urge our British university colleagues to reject the boycott proposal.*

*"I join in solidarity with President Lee Bollinger of Columbia University and Chancellor Robert J. Birgeneau of the University of California, Berkeley, in support of unfettered interaction with Israeli scholars and institutions and in saying to those members of the UCU who would pursue this deplorable action: if you choose to isolate Israeli universities, you should add McGill to your boycott list. We will stand steadfast against those who seek to undermine academic freedom." -- Heather Munroe-Blum, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, McGill University, Montreal, June 19, 2007.*

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*"I want to join my colleagues around the world in urging our colleagues in Britain's University and College Union (UCU) to reject, swiftly and decisively, the proposed boycott against Israeli scholars and academic institutions.*

*"The UCU members who put forward this reprehensible proposal are seeking to isolate and disenfranchise the entire college and university community in Israel because they disagree with Israeli government policy. This runs counter to everything the international university community holds amongst its highest values, including freedom of expression, respect for divergent views, and academic integrity. I concur with Haifa University President Aaron Ben-Zeev that education is the best way to promote Jewish-Arab coexistence, and this should be the goal of everyone who pursues enlightenment.*

*"The University of California is a strong proponent of collaboration with Israeli universities. We will continue to cooperate with them in an active manner, and we will fight any efforts to disenfranchise Israeli*

colleagues. The sooner the UCU defeats this incendiary proposal, the sooner we can all turn our focus back to where it belongs on educating our students and generating new knowledge and a new generation to benefit all the citizens of this global community. -- **Robert C. Dynes, President, University of California**, June 18, 2007.

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"The illegitimacy of that sort of behavior is so conspicuous it will have no traction with American universities. It's an insult to everything we stand for; everything we claim makes us special in our society. We talk about freedom, free speech, unfettered scholarship, and then the Brits behave in this way, inviting political intervention in their affairs from their own government and boycotts from universities who disagree with them. I can't imagine what they were thinking." -- **Stephen Trachtenberg, President, George Washington University**, in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post*, June 18, 2007.

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"I was deeply disappointed by the vote of the University and College Union in Great Britain proposing a boycott against Israeli academic institutions. It is an idea that NYU rejects completely, for such a boycott — at heart a disavowal of the free exchange of ideas — is antithetical to the values and tenets of institutions of advanced learning.

"I am proud to say that on June 1, just a day or two after that vote was held, NYU announced that it was moving forward with plans to establish a new Study Abroad site in Israel in conjunction with Tel Aviv University. Though the timing was fortuitous, I was pleased by it, believing that a demonstrated rejection of the boycott vote is the strongest possible response." -- **John Sexton, President, New York University**, June 15, 2007.

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"The threatened boycott of Israeli universities by Britain's University and College Union is a dangerous and unsupportable attack on the core values of academic life.

"The attempt by one group of scholars to stifle the views of another is an affront to modern society, and must be condemned wherever it arises. Civil discourse, regardless of opposing political opinions, is the only hope for addressing conflict. The world desperately needs more international trade in ideas; we cannot afford less.

"Those British professors who have brought forward this shameful scheme ought to reflect on the example and consequence of intolerance they are communicating to their students.

"If a university is not a safe forum for ideas, popular or otherwise, it fails in its very purpose." -- **Stephen J. Toope, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of British Columbia**, Vancouver, Canada, June 15, 2007.

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"The British University and College Union (UCU) recently voted to propose a boycott of Israeli academic institutions and scholars. I stand opposed. As chancellor of a campus that has seen its share of contentious discourse around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I know firsthand these dialogues can be quite difficult. But an attempt to shun an entire community of scholars based on what appears to be political opposition to the policies of the incumbent government is misguided, outrageous and wrong.

"We strongly support academic freedom and freedom of speech. An academic boycott is diametrically

*opposed to the core values of our university. The highly charged atmosphere in the Middle East demands more contact with the professoriate, not less. Our campus is in fact increasing its contacts with scholars from Israel and the Middle East. Conversely, an academic boycott stifles the intellectual honesty and open discussion that are essential to a rational understanding of any subject. It is a bad idea.*

*"True academic freedom cannot thrive in an environment where any scholar is oppressed, excluded or punished for his or her views, whatever they may be, or whatever we may assume them to be." -- **Michael V. Drake, M.D., Chancellor, University of California, Irvine, June 15, 2007.***

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*"This boycott is a threat not only to Israeli academics but also to open societies everywhere. As president of Yeshiva University, an American university that has immutable ties to Israel, I proudly add our institution to the roster of universities on the boycott list and decline to participate in any activity from which Israeli academics are excluded.*

*"This is a hypocritical act that defies the fundamental raison d'être of a university. This boycott erodes the sanctity of the academic sphere by introducing illegitimate political positions that amount to political blackmail. Moreover, it is irresponsible and detracts from the noble charge of the academy to enlighten and elevate intellectual discourse and advance humankind." -- **Richard Joel, President, Yeshiva University, June 15, 2007.***

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*"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, University of California, Berkeley, June 14, 2007***

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*"Boycotting universities and their faculty restricts the flow of ideas and it is anathema to academic freedom." -- **Edward J. McElroy, President, American Federation of Teachers, May 31, 2007.***