TECHNION
Israel Institute of Technology

האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

מכון ויצמן למדע
WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

Bar-Ilan University
אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY
Pursuing the Unknown

אוניברסיטת חיפה
University of Haifa
جامعة حيفا

אוניברסיטת בן-גוריון בנגב
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

האוניברסיטה הפתוחה
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF ISRAEL
الجامعة المفتوحة

ARIEL UNIVERSITY

Association of University Heads, Israel

November 1, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

We, the leaders of Israeli universities and research institutions, write to express deep concern over the discourse emanating from academia following the devastating Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 and the inadequate response, in many cases, by academic leadership.

On that darkest of days, in a tragedy unprecedented in Israel's 75-year history, the Hamas terrorists infiltrated into the country and murdered more than 1,400 people, including infants, children, students, and senior citizens —Jewish, Muslim, and Christian alike. The attack also included the abduction of 240 civilians of all ages into Gaza; additional missing persons have not yet been identified and accounted for. In the aftermath of these horrific events, we find it disturbing that certain narratives from academic institutions misrepresent the situation, or, in the worst cases, actively target Israelis and Jews.

We find ourselves facing a war on two fronts: one against the atrocities of Hamas, and another in the global arena of public opinion. Regrettably, we have noticed an alarming trend in which Israel, despite its right to self-defense, is mischaracterized as an oppressor. This is a false equivalence between the actions of a murderous terrorist organization and a sovereign state's right to defend its citizens, which unfortunately results in the loss of innocent Palestinian lives. Any attempt to justify or equivocate Hamas's brutal and grotesque actions is intellectually and morally indefensible.

It's unsettling to note that many college campuses have become breeding grounds for anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiments, largely fueled by a naïve and biased understanding of the conflict. It is ironic that the very halls of enlightenment in America and Europe, ostensibly the bastions of intellectual and progressive thought that are your campuses, have adopted Hamas as the cause célèbre while Israel is demonized. Universities, as hubs of enlightenment and rational discourse, must take responsibility for the views they perpetuate.

There is no moral equivalency here. Let's be clear: Hamas shares no values with any Western academic institution. Hamas is an organization that has repeatedly pledged to annihilate Israel and its people.

Its ideology is antithetical to the values of human life and the liberal values we hold dear. Hamas funnels international aid into armament rather than to the welfare of its citizens. While Israel uses its weapons to shield its citizens, Hamas uses its citizens as shields for its weapons—which it hides in hospitals, schools, and mosques. It is crucial to distinguish between Hamas' terrorist objectives and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood. The conflation of the two only serves to fuel hatred and ignorance.

Association of University Heads, Israel

Academic institutions stand as lighthouses in the intellectual landscape, and we ask you to illuminate them. Your roles as leaders of these institutions confer upon you an extraordinary responsibility: to guide the moral and ethical development of your students, to imbue them with the ability to think critically and to discern the nuances that separate right from wrong. Freedom of speech is a cornerstone of academic freedom, but it should not be manipulated to legitimize hate speech or to justify violence.

We urge you to delineate the boundaries between constructive discourse and destructive propaganda, and promote evidence-based, nuanced thinking that challenges simplistic narratives. Expose the falsity of justifications for acts of terror; expose and condemn disingenuous statements; and reject hypocritical voices that justify murder, rape, and destruction in the name of "resistance".

Moreover, we expect that Israeli and Jewish students and faculty on university and college campuses will be accorded the same respect and protections as any other minority. The principles of inclusivity and campus safety must unequivocally extend to include Israeli and Jewish members of your academic communities. Just as it would be unthinkable for an academic institution to extend free speech protections to groups targeting other protected classes, so too should demonstrations that call for our destruction and glorify violence against Jews be explicitly prohibited and condemned.

What the world witnessed on October 7 were not methods to help disadvantaged peoples build better futures for themselves. The events of this terrible day should be taken as a wake-up call to all of the dangers of nihilistic organizations like Hamas and ISIS that represent the very opposite of freedom and liberty.

As leaders of Israeli universities, we have been heartened by clear statements of solidary and support for Israel, which are, at their heart, statements in solidary with humanity, enlightenment, and progress. At the same time, we are calling for a sea change in clarity and truth in academia on the matter of Israel's war against Hamas, so that light will triumph over dark, now and always.

Signed,

Prof. Arie Zaban, President of Bar-Ilan University.
Chairperson of Association of University Heads – VERA

Prof. Daniel A. Chamovitz, President of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Prof. Alon Chen, President of Weizmann Institute of Science

Prof. Asher Cohen, President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Prof. Leo Corry, President of the Open University of Israel

Prof. Ehud Grossman, President of Ariel University

Prof. Ariel Porat, President of Tel-Aviv University

Prof. Ron Robin, President of University of Haifa

Prof. Uri Sivan, President of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology