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ARIEL UNIVERSITY

Association of University Heads, Israel

December 7, 2023

Public Statement of Israel Research Universities Presidents Regarding American Universities Presidents' Statements in Congressional Hearings

Since the horrifying atrocity of October 7th, there has been a distressing surge in anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment on numerous campuses across the United States, including some of its most esteemed universities. Instead of offering empathy and support to Israeli and Jewish students in the wake of the brutal massacre of Jewish communities in their homeland, campuses have witnessed protests advocating for the annihilation of the State of Israel ("from the river to the sea") and endorsing terrorist activities against Israeli citizens ("intifada"). There has been a disturbing display of hatred towards Jews and Israelis, causing fear among this community on American campuses. This resurgence of hostility evokes memories of dark chapters in Jewish history.

Under these distressing circumstances, there is an urgent need for firm leadership on American campuses—leadership that unequivocally declares, "This far, no further." Regrettably, such resolute leadership appears to be lacking at present. While some individual academic leaders have vocally opposed anti-Semitism and actively worked against it, many others have remained silent.

In a disconcerting recent hearing held in the U.S. Congress, presidents from three prominent universities (Harvard, MIT, and Pennsylvania) were questioned about their stance on severe instances of anti-Semitism on their campuses. Although these leaders acknowledged the existence of anti-Semitic expressions, they maintained that curbing a significant portion of these expressions is challenging due to their protection under the banner of free speech.

During a critical moment in the congressional hearing, the university presidents were asked whether a call for the genocide of the Jewish people aligns with their institutions' codes of conduct. Astonishingly, they struggled to provide a straightforward "no" and instead offered vague responses, suggesting that the response depends on the context. This hesitation raises concerning questions about the interpretation of free speech.

Following the hearing, the president of Harvard University released a brief statement emphasizing the institution's prohibition of anti-Semitic expressions, a sentiment echoed by the president of the University of Pennsylvania.

The positions taken by the university presidents during the congressional hearing, suggesting that anti-Semitic expressions and calls for genocide may fall under the umbrella of free speech, defy the principles of the U.S. Constitution. A nation that permits a call for genocide in the guise of freedom of speech does a disservice to its values. Freedom of speech, while a fundamental right, must yield in the face of incitement, hatred, and calls for violence, especially a call for genocide. This principle holds true not only in the United States but also in all democratic countries globally.

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The university presidents' failure to provide a firm stance in dealing with instances of anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment on many campuses in the United States is alarming. Apologies and expressions of regret are not enough; what is required are clear and decisive actions. In their testimony before Congress, the university presidents mentioned measures taken or planned to protect the security and well-being of Jews and Israelis on campuses.

It is now their responsibility to ensure the effectiveness and sufficiency of these measures. The burden lies on their shoulders to demonstrate that the universities they lead not only excel in academics but also uphold universal humanistic values and defend the rights of minorities. It is imperative that everyone understands that advocating for the destruction of a people is strictly prohibited at Harvard, MIT, Pennsylvania, and everywhere else in the world.

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