



October 16, 2019

Chancellor Robert J. Jones

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

517 Swan Land Building

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Dear Chancellor Jones,

We write as chair of the advisory board, executive director, and deputy executive director, respectively, of the [Academic Engagement Network](#) (*AEN*), an independent and non-partisan national organization comprised of over 700 faculty members on more than 235 campuses across the United States. AEN seeks to counter the delegitimization of Israel on campus, helps to defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promotes robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and responds to antisemitism on campus when it occurs.

We write to express our admiration for the mass-mail [statement](#) that you released on October 10. It is our view that your statement was exactly right and that you stated clearly and unequivocally what needed to be said in the wake of swastika graffiti found on the UIUC campus and a mandatory staff development program, in which Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli members of your campus community were left intimidated and demoralized. What is required, and what you understand so well, is leadership—and a willingness to provide a moral compass in apologizing for and denouncing these acts and expressions of hatred and discrimination that are antithetical to UIUC's values.

We understand that you are now [facing reproach](#) and that some campus constituencies are even insisting that you retract your October 10 statement. In light of this [ongoing pushback](#) to your strong statement and its message of tolerance and inclusivity, we wish to provide you with our organization's full and unequivocal support.

We applaud you for taking a public stand against acts and expressions of hatred and bias which serve to isolate, demean, and marginalize Jews, Zionists, and Israelis on your campus. We further applaud you for initiating an immediate and full review of hiring, training and oversight of the university's Residential Advisors and Multicultural Advocates; commissioning an external review of Housing's multicultural educational programs; and pledging to launch campus-wide education and training about antisemitism for Housing staff, Resident Advisors, and Multicultural Advocates. We believe that these measures will help

UIUC to move forward in the right direction as an academic institution that honors free expression and open inquiry while ensuring that all individuals and communities feel welcomed and respected.

Your forceful condemnation of the recent antisemitic incidents at UIUC, which challenge the fundamental values of tolerance and inclusion, along with the corrective actions that you have now committed to undertake, are essential for addressing pernicious forms of anti-Israel activism. In recent years, we have witnessed that these can range from attempts to exclude Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli students from participation in campus life, particularly in progressive coalitions and causes, to efforts to discredit major Jewish organizations and initiatives. The underlying aim in most of these instances is to isolate Jewish, Zionist, and Israeli students, faculty and staff and to attack their identities. Those who speak out against virulent anti-Zionism and the demonization and delegitimization of Israel on their campuses are frequently accused of acting in bad faith and of seeking to silence legitimate criticism of Israel. There are now accumulating reports of Jewish students feeling compelled to hide their identities, from fear of being targeted as racists or denied access to campus activities.


Among the specific challenges in this evolving campus landscape is that many administrators and staff members who work in Student Affairs and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion offices often do not see the needs of Jewish members of the campus community as directly within their primary purview. There are often ideological blinders and a serious lack of awareness within the professional culture of some of these offices about the multifaceted nature of contemporary antisemitism. This impedes responsiveness to incidents of bias and discrimination when they occur and to the perspectives and concerns of Jewish, Zionist and Israeli members of the campus community. Educational goals can also be compromised when a nuanced commentary on the complex and intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict gives way to extremist and hate-filled presentations—as happened in the case of the inappropriate Housing staff development program which you described in your October 10 statement and in subsequent meetings with faculty and students.

The issues raised by this new campus reality are also complex for faculty and administrators, who value the bedrock principles of academic freedom and campus free speech while seeking to support students who are buffeted by the rise of antisemitic incidents and attacks on their Jewish identities. As you have acknowledged, addressing these challenges requires the development and implementation of policies, programs, and training that can offer a full understanding of antisemitism, along with its multiple manifestations and the troubling ways in which left antisemitism and right antisemitism can often intersect. On campuses, we are witnessing an uptick in classical forms of antisemitic expression and even hate crimes where a toxic and hostile anti-Israel rhetoric goes unchecked and without comment or condemnation from faculty and administrators. In some cases, it may be that off-campus far-right white supremacists view such campuses as fertile spaces for their own brand of Jew-hatred. In other cases, vehemently anti-Zionist and anti-Israel activists on campus may themselves be [trafficking](#) in classical antisemitic conspiracies and tropes and canards.

You are to be commended for [acknowledging](#) that UIUC has “a problem as a community.” As you move forward with remedial action aimed at creating a healthy and safe climate for Jewish, Zionist and Israeli members of your campus, you are fortunate to have a number of UIUC faculty to whom you can turn. These faculty have expertise on the definition and multifaceted nature of antisemitism, the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, and the ways in which a robust, critical, and vibrant discourse on Israel and Palestine can be achieved without any group on campus feeling isolated, demoralized, or under siege. In developing your policies and training programs, we encourage you to reach out to these UIUC faculty, who are also members of our organization, including Jeff Brown, Rachel Harris, Richard Herman, and Cary Nelson.

Please feel free to reach out to us as well. We stand ready to share with you our expertise, and the best practices that we have developed for recognizing and countering antisemitism while ensuring free speech on campus. You may also be interested to know that we are currently partnering with campus experts to develop a model curriculum for the training and education of mid-level administrators and staff in student affairs and diversity, equity and inclusion offices. Now being piloted at the University of California, Berkeley, we envision these materials being made available soon to other campuses. It is our hope that this specialized training will help to ensure that campus policies are applied to Jewish and pro-Israel students in the same manner as to students from other minority groups, and that university administrators and staff members who are charged with protecting the rights of all students have the support, resources and training they need to affectively address the issues and concerns that directly affect Jewish student life on campus.

Sincerely yours,



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