



May 10, 2021

Dr. G. Gabrielle Starr
President, Pomona College
Office of the President
333 N. College Way
Claremont, California 91711

By email: president@pomona.edu

Dear President Starr:

We write to you in our capacities as Chair of the Advisory Board and Executive Director of the [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) to express our concerns regarding the campus climate for Jewish and Israeli students at Pomona College in light of the recent passage of a virulently anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) resolution by the Associated Students of Pomona College (ASPC).

AEN is an independent and non-partisan national organization which 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. Chaired by Mark G. Yudof, former President of the University of California system, prominent university leaders and distinguished scholars serve on AEN's [Advisory Board](#), including Scott Cowen, Roger D. Kornberg, Deborah E. Lipstadt, and Steven Davidoff Solomon, among others. In addition, a number of faculty members in the Claremont Colleges consortium are longtime members of AEN.

As leaders of AEN, we wish both to commend you on your [swift response](#) to the April 22 vote of the Associated Students of Pomona College (ASPC) to adopt a "[Resolution Banning the Use of ASPC Funding to Support the Occupation of Palestine](#)" and to urge you to speak out forcefully once again in response to the ASPC's more recent vote, on May 6, to adopt a modified, and still highly troubling, version of the resolution.

The resolution adopted on April 22 committed the ASPC to "change its internal spending habits ... by stopping [] categorical spending on items that knowingly support the Israeli occupation of Palestine." The resolution also contained a clause urging each of the student government associations within the Claremont consortium to agree to ban student clubs from using student government funds "to invest in or purchase goods or services from companies that contribute to the settlement and occupation of Palestinian occupied territories by the U.N.-designated

companies or the Israeli state.” Student clubs that failed to adhere to this boycott would face the loss of all Claremont Colleges Student Government Association funds.

We appreciate that you, joined by other university leaders, promptly released a strong and unequivocal statement to the campus community the next day in which you expressed “deep concern” about both the substance and the process surrounding the resolution’s adoption. In terms of process, your statement directly and appropriately called out the ASPC for holding the vote without adequate representation from students who would be opposed to the resolution and without an opportunity for the student body as a whole to debate it. You correctly noted that this was especially troubling given the “extraordinary strain in which we are living, the ways in which the politics of the Middle East are so deeply connected to religious identities and that this vote came at a time when students are away from campus amid a global pandemic.” Further, your statement also highlighted the importance of ensuring that the student government process remains inclusive and representative of *all* members of the Pomona College community while stating your belief, with which we fully agree, that the vote by the ASPC will only “work against the dialogue that is critical for constructive engagement of diverse voices on our campus.”

Regarding the especially worrisome portion of the April 22 resolution that urged the adoption of a Claremont consortium-wide boycott of Israel-related goods and services, your April 23 letter stated clearly: “The resolution’s stated goal of eventually enacting requirements that all student clubs supported by ASPC—not just ASPC itself—comply with its divestment stance or lose funding is also of deep concern, as it would require all students, regardless of their views, to participate in a boycott.” As others have written (see, e.g., [here](#) and [here](#)), such a compelled boycott would seriously undercut Pomona’s commitment to protecting free expression and viewpoint diversity. Thus, you forthrightly urged the ASPC to “reverse course” and allow for a full discussion and debate on the matter.

After tabling the resolution in response to concerns from your administration as well as many members of the Pomona College community, including Jewish student groups, the ASPC [held a second vote](#) last Thursday, May 6. As [reported](#) by the *Claremont Independent*, the ASPC voted to adopt a modified version of the resolution that removed the call for a consortium-wide boycott of Israeli goods but retained the language mandating changes in ASPC’s internal spending.

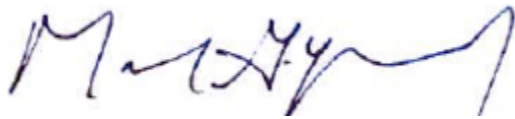
While the revised resolution may not raise an immediate concern about protecting free expression, it remains a highly inflammatory, divisive, and biased document. First, by committing the ASPC to cease spending on goods and services that are connected with one, and only one, nation in the world—Israel—the resolution sends a clear and unmistakable signal to Jewish-Zionist and Israeli students at Pomona: “you are not welcome in our campus community.” The resolution reinforces this message with its egregiously false comparison of Israeli policies to those of the government of apartheid-era South Africa. Further, Jewish students have reported to colleagues of ours that during the May 6 virtual meeting when the vote occurred, they were not given adequate opportunity to raise their views and concerns and therefore they were, once again, effectively silenced. Reasonable suggestions to delay the vote so as to ensure further discussion and a more inclusive process were not heeded. In short, many of the concerns you expressed after the first vote on April 22—namely that the student government process embrace participation by *all* members of the Pomona College community, not just those

members who are sympathetic with the views of the resolution’s sponsors, and that it model “constructive engagement” and include “diverse voices on our campus”—have not been remedied.

While it is understandable that your administration may not wish to direct the ASPC as to how to spend its budget, we urge you to exercise your moral authority as President of Pomona College to speak out forcefully in opposition to this misguided resolution. Further, in light of the resolution’s potential negative impact on campus Jewish life and the fact that Jewish students have voiced feeling “uncomfortable and unwelcome on campus,” we hope that you will commit to developing educational programming and trainings that can offer diverse perspectives about Israel and the Jewish experience, as well as the multifaceted nature of contemporary antisemitism, in order to foster the positive learning environment that you so strongly support.

Through its leadership team, advisory board members, and its national faculty network, AEN has considerable expertise in helping universities and colleges develop and deliver such programming and trainings. If we in the AEN leadership can be of any assistance to you, now or in the future, please do not hesitate to call on us.

With best wishes,



Mark G. Yudof
Chair, Board of Advisors
Academic Engagement Network



Miriam F. Elman
Executive Director
Academic Engagement Network

cc (by email): Robert Gaines, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of College (robert.gaines@pomona.edu); Avis Hinkson, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students (avis.hinkson@pomona.edu); Christina Ciambriello, Chief of Staff and Secretary to the Board of Trustees (christina.ciambriello@pomona.edu)