



March 29, 2022

President Michael V. Drake, MD

Office of the President | University of California

1111 Franklin Street | Oakland, CA 94607

Via Email: [president@ucop.edu](mailto:president@ucop.edu)

Dear President Drake,

We write as the Executive Director and Managing Director, respectively, of the [Academic Engagement Network \(AEN\)](#) regarding UC-Berkeley's Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES), UCLA's Center for Near Eastern Studies (CNES), and UCSB's Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) which are currently [institutional members](#) of the *Middle East Studies Association* (MESA), a non-profit [academic organization](#) that fosters the study of the Middle East and "encourages public understanding of the region and its peoples." Institutional membership in MESA [costs](#) \$1100 annually and confers a variety of benefits such as waived fees to attend and hold events at its annual meeting.

As you may know, last week MESA's leadership announced that its members voted to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement by ratifying a [resolution](#) endorsing an academic boycott of Israel. According to its March 23 [press release](#), MESA's Board of Directors will now work in consultation with the group's Committee on Academic Freedom to enforce this resolution and to uphold the call for an academic boycott. In light of this disturbing and serious development, we write to urge you to join with other universities and colleges that have recently [withdrawn](#) their institutional membership with MESA; to reaffirm the University of California's commitment to freedom of scholarly inquiry, open intellectual exchange, and academic freedom; and to ensure that an academic boycott of Israel will not be implemented on your campuses.

AEN is an independent and non-partisan national organization comprised of nearly 850 faculty members on more than 250 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. Chaired by Mark G. Yudof, former President of the University of California, prominent university leaders and distinguished scholars serve on AEN's Advisory Board, including Irwin Cotler, Roger D. Kornberg, Deborah E. Lipstadt, Steven Pinker, Steven Davidoff Solomon, Lawrence H. Summers, and Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, among others. In addition, AEN has many faculty members from across the University of California's 10 campuses. We are also proud to have provided multi-year [seed funding](#) to UC-Berkeley's impressive and highly impactful [Antisemitism Education Initiative](#).

As we noted in our recent [statement](#), it is disheartening that MESA has embraced BDS and the academic boycott of Israel. The *American Association of University Professors* (AAUP), along with hundreds of university leaders, have long rejected academic boycotts as inherently discriminatory and detrimental to the core values and bedrock principles that define the academy, namely the open and unfettered communication of ideas and the academic freedom to conduct intellectual exchange without fear of retaliation. MESA's endorsement of the academic boycott of Israel will clearly infringe on the academic

freedom of its members who wish to engage with their Israeli counterparts on research and other matters.

Moreover, now that it has adopted an academic boycott and plans to implement it, we believe that the University of California's continued participation in MESA violates the 2018 University of California Chancellors' [joint statement](#) which forcefully and unequivocally denounced the boycott of Israeli academic institutions and/or individual scholars as a "serious threat" to the academic freedom of UC faculty and students.

Lastly, since UC-Berkeley's CMES and UCLA's CNES are both recipients of federal funding under Title VI, remaining affiliated with MESA while the organization implements an academic boycott of Israel's academy would very likely be non-compliant with the conditions stipulated by this federal grant program to "promote access to research and training overseas, including through linkages with overseas institutions" and could potentially put this funding into jeopardy.

Firmly committed to the free flow of ideas and intellectual engagement across national, religious, and cultural divides, AEN opposes the BDS academic boycott against Israel even as we recognize that, as individuals, faculty have the right to endorse and advocate for BDS and to support its call for an academic boycott of Israel's universities and colleges. But University of California centers do not have the right to violate the academic freedom of UC faculty or to deny educational opportunities to UC students. Accordingly, we urge you to:

- immediately sever all University of California institutional affiliations with MESA, as other universities have already done in response to this resolution;
- publicly acknowledge the harm that an academic boycott of Israel would cause for students and faculty on UC campuses; and,
- reaffirm your unambiguous opposition to the implementation of academic BDS.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can be of further help or assistance.

Sincerely yours,



Miriam F. Elman, Executive Director

[miriam@academicengagement.org](mailto:miriam@academicengagement.org)



Josh Suchoff, Managing Director

[josh@academicengagement.org](mailto:josh@academicengagement.org)

Cc: UC-Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ, [chancellor@berkeley.edu](mailto:chancellor@berkeley.edu); UCLA Chancellor Gene Block, [chancellor@ucla.edu](mailto:chancellor@ucla.edu); UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang, [henry.yang@ucsb.edu](mailto:henry.yang@ucsb.edu)