



April 6, 2022

Christopher L. Eisgruber, President
Princeton University | Office of the President
1 Nassau Hall
Princeton, NJ 08544

Via email: cleisgruber@princeton.edu

Dear President Eisgruber,

We write as chair of the Advisory Board, Executive Director, and Managing Director, respectively, of the [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) regarding an undergraduate-wide referendum aligned with the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement which students are set to vote on next week. As we note further below, we are concerned that this referendum could negatively impact the campus climate for Jewish students and lead to an increase in campus antisemitism. Should the proposed measure pass, we call on you to reject it and to reaffirm your commitment to ensuring that Princeton remains a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for Jewish and all students.

AEN is an independent and non-partisan national organization comprised of over 830 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. Prominent university leaders and distinguished scholars serve on AEN's Advisory Board, including Irwin Cotler, Deborah E. Lipstadt, Steven Pinker, Donna Shalala, Lawrence H. Summers, and Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, among others.

The referendum that was [advanced](#) by the Princeton Undergraduate Student Government (USG) calls on the university to stop using Caterpillar machinery in campus construction projects due to "the violent role that Caterpillar machinery has [purportedly] played in the mass demolition of Palestinian homes, the murder of Palestinians and other innocent people, and the promotion of the prison-industrial complex." Though the referendum itself does not explicitly reference or cite BDS, the accompanying explanation submitted by its main sponsor (the Princeton Committee on Palestine) does, making it clear that the impetus for this referendum is to situate the campus within the global anti-Israel BDS movement, which seeks to delegitimize Israel and its supporters through diplomatic, financial, academic, and cultural isolation.

From our vantage point, we are increasingly concerned that this unbridled hatred of Israel is undermining the mission of the academy. While most U.S. campuses are not awash in antisemitism, recent trends point to an increasingly [challenging climate](#) for Jewish students, especially those for whom Zionism is an integral part of their identity and their ethnic and ancestral heritage. We note with urgency that student activism around BDS is inimical to the inclusive, tolerant, and respectful learning community to which you and so many other university leaders aspire.

We commend you for the strong [stance](#) you took in May 2021 against antisemitism and antisemitic acts that were then taking place at Princeton, in the U.S., and around the world. In addition, given AEN's firm commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the academy, we agree wholeheartedly with your assertion that, "Sharp, intense, and provocative disagreement about Israel and Palestine is fully consistent with the debate that must occur on college campuses." While difficult conversations on contentious topics are important and disagreements are inevitable, numerous studies and [reports](#) have documented that BDS activism coarsens the discourse on campus and can promote prejudice and hate, which demeans and marginalizes Jews and Zionists.

Quite frankly, BDS creates divisions and polarizes the campus. Indeed, research that we recently released shows that pro-BDS student activism leads to a [marked increase](#) in antisemitic incidents and bias reporting on campus. While many well-meaning people gravitate to BDS believing that it offers a means for advancing social justice and peace in the Middle East, the reality is that this movement is reactionary and fundamentally illiberal.

We hope that you will use next week's vote on the BDS-aligned referendum as a springboard for an action plan to create the inclusive community and positive learning environment that you so strongly support. As well, we trust that, should the referendum pass, you will refuse to consider it and will publicly oppose the BDS movement, as you have done in the past.

If it is of interest, we would be happy to share with you our expertise and the [best practices](#) that we have developed for advancing Israel literacy, recognizing and countering antisemitism, and ensuring academic freedom and free speech on campus. AEN would be pleased to assist in any way that you deem appropriate. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

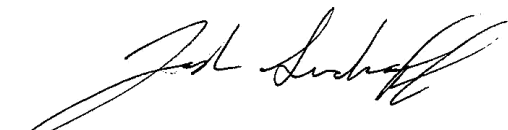
Sincerely yours,



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