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70 Harvard Faculty, Including Former U.S. Treasury Secretary and Harvard President Larry Summers, Admonish Crimson BDS Endorsement

Numerous Renowned Academics, Including Ruth Wisse, Alan Dershowitz and Steven Pinker, Among Signatories

Washington, DC, May 9, 2022 – Seventy Harvard faculty, including former U.S. Treasury Secretary and Harvard President Larry Summers, today [rebuked](#) the Harvard Crimson for its recent [endorsement](#) of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, noting that BDS is not, in fact, a movement for social justice.

“As members of the faculty of Harvard University, we are dismayed by The Crimson Editorial Board’s enthusiastic endorsement of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel,” proclaimed the faculty.

Renowned leaders in their fields Gabriella Blum, Amy Comander, Alan Dershowitz, Gary R. Fleisher, Jesse Fried, Jeffrey Hamburger, Jon D. Levenson, Robert Mnookin, Eric Nelson, Elisa New, Steven Pinker, Steven Shavell, David Stern, Ruth Wisse and Richard Zeckhauser are some of the other Harvard faculty who have added their names to the [statement](#), which was organized by Harvard-affiliated members of the Academic Engagement Network (AEN).

The faculty raised serious concerns about the impact of the Crimson BDS endorsement on the “well-being of Jewish and Zionist students at Harvard, some of whom have already [reported](#) that they have become alienated from the newspaper on account of the inhospitable culture that prevails there;” admonished the Crimson for endorsing a movement that “compromises educational goals by turning the complex and intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a caricature that singles out only one side for blame with a false binary of oppressor versus oppressed” and proclaimed their support for “Harvard’s ties with Israel, a country that is home to some of the world’s best universities” that “our research and teaching missions benefit from.”

The faculty note that while many people gravitate to BDS believing it offers a means for advancing Palestinian rights and peace in the Middle East, “the reality is that BDS merely coarsens the discourse on campus and [contributes](#) to antisemitism. In seeking to delegitimize Israel through diplomatic, economic, academic, and cultural isolation, and by opposing the very notions of Jewish peoplehood and self-determination, BDS is disrespectful of Jews, the vast majority of whom view an attachment to Israel as central to their faith identity.”

The statement also debunks the Crimson’s understanding of BDS. Contrary to the Crimson editorial, note the faculty, BDS does not advocate for coexistence, peace building toward a two-state solution, or dialogue with Israel’s supporters on campus. BDS negates the importance of Israel for Jewish continuity and as a refuge and safe haven for Jews who need one. It excludes Israel’s remarkable achievements as a post-colonial nation after independence, ignores the country’s relative successes in integrating waves of multi-ethnic and multi-racial communities, and neglects Israel’s own efforts at peace. BDS casts Israel as uniquely malevolent among nations, with any and all attempts at mutual understanding to be resisted.

In addition, contrary to BDS false claims that Zionism is “an illegitimate and oppressive movement,” note the faculty, it is in fact a belief in the right of the Jewish people to a homeland and self-determination, and it is nothing new. Zionism is a millennia-old tradition, with deep roots in Jewish history and religious practice, and more recently serves as an international response to the utter failure to produce freedom and safety for Jews living in most places in the world.

The faculty also noted that the Harvard College Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), to which the Editorial Board gave full-throated support in its editorial, “callously displayed” a “Wall of Resistance” [art installation](#) which equated Zionism

with racism and white supremacy. “Such language is shameful and has no place at Harvard. We call out this rhetoric for what it is: anti-Jewish hate speech that is antithetical to the values of any academic institution,” emphasized the faculty.

The faculty members urged the Crimson editorial board to reach out to Jewish peers to begin to repair the damage caused by writing such a “divisive” editorial and to properly educate themselves about Jewish identity, Israel and the multifaceted nature of contemporary antisemitism.

According to the ADL, antisemitic incidents, often including violence, have reached an [all-time](#) high.

“We at Harvard have a responsibility to recognize the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to acknowledge the lived experiences, traumas, hopes and dreams of all peoples impacted by it. The mission of our great university is to rigorously interrogate and debate complex problems. We are at our best when we consider and evaluate competing perspectives, focus on facts, acknowledge nuances, and avoid simplistic, monocausal explanations,” concluded the faculty.

The statement will remain open for signatures until the end of the week when it will be delivered along with its signatory list to The Crimson, Harvard President Lawrence Bacow and other university officials. All Harvard-affiliated members of AEN’s Advisory Board are initial signatories. U.S. Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism Deborah Lipstadt, former Canadian Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler, and former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services and U.S. Representative Donna Shalala also serve on AEN’s Advisory Board.

Earlier this year, AEN developed the [2022 Guide and Resource Book](#) for university administrators to use to advance Israel literacy, recognize and counter antisemitism, and ensure academic freedom and free speech on campus.

AEN is an independent and non-partisan national organization comprised of over 830 faculty members on more than 250 campuses across the United States. The organization 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.