

Life Sciences Academics for the Protection of the Free Exchange of Knowledge

June 21, 2016

Dear Academic Life Sciences Leader:

We, the undersigned, are members of the academic life sciences community. We believe that the free flow of ideas and information is integral to our work. Efforts to restrain and otherwise undermine communication between and among academics from around the world are misguided and inconsistent with the liberal ideals that have fueled democracy and brought vitality to the scientific enterprise. It is with this understanding that we look upon recent efforts to boycott Israeli academics and universities with mounting concern. We choose to speak out now in the hopes that doing so will ensure that such misguided initiatives do not undermine the global cooperation that has been so central to the life-saving efforts of the academic life sciences.

We therefore affirm that:

- Academic boycott measures contravene core democratic values that promote the dialogue and cooperation essential to advancing knowledge, solving problems and promoting understanding.
- Academic boycotts that undermine the open and free exchange of ideas pose a danger to the global exchange of information upon which the life sciences and the academic world depend.
- Academic boycott measures that are being promoted across Europe, and now increasingly in the United States, single out one nation, Israel, while overlooking all others. Efforts to advance such measures reflect a readiness to leverage the prestige and influence of the academia to advance narrow political interests.

Usurping the academic world for such purposes risks lasting harm to the integrity of the scientific community and all academic institutions. Academic leaders from across the United States are responding to this danger. They include Janet Napolitano, Chancellor of the University of California system; Dr. Rafael Reif, President of MIT and Dr. Hunter Rawlings, President of the Association of American Universities (members include 62 research universities including Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Princeton and Stanford); and hundreds of other university presidents.

Efforts to advance academic boycotts nevertheless have persisted. At this moment, nearly a dozen academic associations and departments are on record in support of academic boycotts of Israel. Others are considering such measures and discussions about boycotts are occurring in academic settings across the country.

Without offering an opinion on any given conflict or political debate, we believe that academic boycotts aimed at advancing narrow political interests do great harm to the work we do and the integrity of the institutions that we serve. The free flow of information and ideas is the lifeblood of the academic world. Efforts to leverage universities to boycott Israeli (or any other) universities and/or academic communities need to be firmly rejected by those of us whose life saving work depends upon the free, open and democratic exchange of ideas.

We, therefore, urge that members of the academic life sciences community join with us, take a stand and register their objection to existing and proposed academic boycott measures. We also encourage other academic disciplines join with us in this effort.

Respectfully,

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