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Setting the Record Straight: The Truth about Tel Aviv University

In recent days, Tel Aviv University (TAU) has found itself unfairly targeted by pro-Palestinian protestors across multiple campuses, who have included the severance of ties with our institution in their list of demands. To our great dismay, this call has been accompanied by a wave of misinformation, distorting the truth about TAU and its values, and spreading not only inaccuracies but outright lies and even malicious blood libels. It is imperative to correct these misconceptions and present the truth about our university.

Since its founding in 1956, TAU has been dedicated to advancing excellent research and world-class education. Evolving amidst a history of violent regional conflicts, as well as within a society marked by ethnic and religious tensions and political polarization, the university has remained steadfast in its commitment to fostering peace and to safeguarding democracy and human rights. We work actively on integrating the diverse sectors of Israeli society and extending the promise of higher education to minority students, including Palestinians. Renowned for its pluralism, our campus is a place where contentious issues are rigorously examined based on reason and facts, and where faculty members are empowered to explore ideas that challenge the prevailing consensus in Israel.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Mutual Respect

TAU is a microcosm of Israeli society, welcoming students from all backgrounds and religions, including Muslim, Christian and Druze Palestinians. The baseless accusation of "apartheid" at TAU made by BDS supporters is not only false but offensive, given the efforts we made for years to foster diversity on our campus. In fact, TAU has increased the representation of Arabs on campus to 16%, close to their proportion in the general population. Programs such as Sawa (support for Palestinian students through The Office of Student Success), the Cohn Program (supporting Palestinian students in the Humanities), and the Neubauer Fellowships (supporting Palestinian PhD students and Faculty in the STEM areas) demonstrate our commitment to creating a safe and nurturing environment for our Palestinian students, and to opening for them the doors to success.

TAU was the first university in Israel to establish a Commission for Equity, Diversity, and Community headed by Vice President Prof. Neta Ziv. The Commission runs a pre-academic "gap year" program for young Arab adults, coordinates a forum of *Faculty for a Shared Campus* (chaired by an Arab and a Jewish Faculty member), and funds a variety of activities that bring together Jewish and Arab students in curricular and extracurricular activities.

Since most young Jews and Arabs in Israel study in separate school systems, university campuses are often where they meet and interact for the first time. We consider it our responsibility to further positive interactions between Jewish and Arab students and so to contribute to a future society in Israel that is characterized by equity and mutual respect.

Thanks to these strong foundations and the unwavering efforts of TAU's leadership, studies throughout this year have so far proceeded without disruption, even amid the backdrop of war. While certain tensions persist between Jewish and Palestinian students, the university's proactive measures--including comprehensive training and organizational consultation for faculty and staff prior to the academic year--ensured a welcoming environment for all students. Overall, the semester unfolded seamlessly, underscoring the capacity of Israeli universities to provide a beacon of hope and a platform for Jews and Arabs to engage in shared learning, research, and interaction, even in the face of adversity.

Working for Peace in the Middle East and Justice in Israel

For decades, faculty at TAU have spearheaded projects and initiatives aimed at fostering peaceful relations in the region. Following the peace treaty with Egypt, TAU faculty established the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo, dedicated to nurturing cultural exchange and enhancing mutual understanding between Israelis and Egyptians. Our longstanding program in European Studies convenes Jordanian, West-Bank Palestinian, and Israeli students for specialized study and cross-cultural dialogue. Our engineering faculty engages in a fruitful partnership with Arab researchers at Jordan's particle accelerator, while scholars in Environmental Studies, Zoology, Medicine, and Life Sciences collaborate with Palestinian and Jordanian counterparts on projects designed to drive innovation on regional challenges in climate change, agriculture, sustainable development, public health, and genetics. Meanwhile, faculty in Middle East Studies oversee impactful programs such as the "Program for Regional Cooperation" and the "Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation," true to our commitment to bridge divides in the region through person-to-person relations.

Other faculty members at TAU devote their energies to developing projects that benefit the Palestinian population. The Faculty of Humanities runs a community project in Lod and Jaffa, working with low-income Arab families. TAU's law clinics have for decades represented members of the Palestinian minority in land and housing discrimination cases. The Community Theatre Department works with Jewish and Arab children with disabilities in the city of Ramle, and the School of Medicine engages our students in what is probably the most salient integrator in Israeli society - our public hospitals and health system.

Protection of Free Speech

Contrary to false claims by BDS supporters, TAU staunchly defends the principle of free speech even when it comes to the most contentious issues. *Not a single TAU student or staff member has now or ever been punished for expressing pro-Palestinian views.*

In fact, last month great public pressure was placed on the university to reprimand or expel a faculty member who expressed support for a convicted Palestinian terrorist. TAU's President refused to entertain such measures, and even declined a summon to appear before the Israeli Parliament to discuss the matter.

Commitment to Democracy and Human Rights

TAU stands as a beacon of democracy and human rights in Israel, unafraid to challenge governmental policies that threaten to undermine these principles. Over the past year, TAU's president has been a vocal critic of the government's attempted legal overhaul and has vowed to defy any policies or laws that would undermine the foundations of democracy and human rights. TAU's Senate, with a sweeping majority, called upon the government to halt the legal overhaul, stressing its potential adverse effects on minority rights. TAU's President, in response to a Bill sanctioning waving the flag of the Palestinian authority on campus, publicly declared that the University would not obey such law if enacted, for being unconstitutional and void.

Like any large, vibrant, liberal academic community, TAU encompasses a diverse array of opinions and voices. It sees its role as promoting conversation on the most controversial and difficult topics on the public agenda, including governmental and military policies during war. In doing so, it seeks to model a dialogue that is respectful, attentive, and evidence based. TAU was the first in Israel to hold a conference on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, bringing this topic to the center of public attention.

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TAU regards academic boycotts as dangerous and antithetical to the principles of research advancement and cultural exchange. Boycotts threaten to hinder human progress and can punish institutions like TAU that strive to be forces for good within their respective countries. We at TAU remain strongly committed to diversity, free speech, democracy, minority rights, and research for humanity and peace, notwithstanding the unfounded criticisms leveled against us.