

January 2, 2024

To the Members of the Governing Boards  
Harvard University  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
University of Pennsylvania

Dear Members of the Governing Board:

We are deeply concerned by the restrained reactions of the leaders of your institutions to overtly antisemitic activities on your campuses. We were dismayed by the Congressional testimonies of Presidents Gay, Kornbluth, and Magill, who refused to condemn calls for genocide unconditionally.

Freedom of expression is unacceptable when it supports hate, genocide, rape, mutilation, and kidnapping—as in the premeditated, unprovoked, unprecedented, barbaric, and perverse terror attack by Hamas against citizens, children, and women in Israel on October 7, 2023. This attack was part of a proclaimed effort by Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Iran to annihilate Israel, which they deny the right to exist, despite the fact that the State of Israel has continued to pursue peace with its neighbors. For them, there are 56 Islamic states, but a single Jewish state is one too many.

Expressing support for the deadliest attack against Jewish people since the Holocaust is despicable and abhorrent. University leaders should condemn any expression of support for such actions. Calls for murder should be deemed unacceptable and penalized without any qualifications. Incitement to violence or hate speech based on race, ethnicity, or religion is wrong, irrespective of “context.” Allowing these provocations at your institutions is a moral failure that violates your codes of conduct, may expose you to legal action, and significantly threatens academic performance.

Tolerating vehement demonstrations at your campuses in support of the worst crimes against humanity undermines the fundamental purpose of your institutions of education and research. Tolerating support for violence contravenes a critical element in a climate necessary for learning and exploring: psychological safety.<sup>1, 2</sup> This concept, studied by prominent scholars—some from your own institutions,<sup>2-4</sup> is becoming increasingly recognized as a key factor for individual and team growth in many settings, including in education organizations.<sup>1, 5, 6</sup>

A sense of security is critical for academic performance, respectful debate, and trustful collaboration—nurturing research and scientific progress. Fear in the workplace

adversely impacts performance. An eminent scholar in quality improvement, Edwards Deming, once advised, “Drive out fear of the organization so that everyone may work effectively for the company.” Sooner or later, allowing fear on your campuses will significantly compromise your academic excellence.

History teaches us that allowing antisemitism to grow can have severe consequences for academic institutions. This was the case in 1938 at a prestigious medical school in Vienna, from which it has yet to fully recover<sup>7</sup> (as discussed in an accompanying editorial).<sup>8</sup> “These events left the faculty, once home to numerous Nobel Laureates, depleted of outstanding researchers and teachers—a situation that persisted for years after the war.” If Jewish students and faculty feel unsafe at your campuses and opt to leave, just as any other talented minority or individual would if they perceived threats to themselves, your institutions will suffer a loss. Allowing hate to flourish gives rise to profound apprehensions about the future caliber of your universities.

According to a recent Harvard-Harris poll, 51% of Americans aged 18 to 24 support solving the Israel-Palestinian conflict by ending the Jewish state and handing it over to Hamas. Interestingly, only 4% of Americans aged 65+ thought so, possibly because they were raised on a Holocaust perspective of the right for Israel to exist, not on biased, misleading messages in social media. Higher education has an important mission to correct blatant ignorance of the past.

Besides unequivocal condemnation and disciplinary action in response to antisemitic provocations, we suggest organizing educational activities, seminars, invited lectures, courses, and workshops about psychological safety and listening to the Other across all departments and facilities,<sup>9-12</sup> as well as discussing the moral lessons of the Holocaust.<sup>13-16</sup> The evidence is that listening reduces extremism, develops humility, and promotes psychological safety.<sup>9-12</sup> A central message from the history of the Holocaust to teach in higher education is to prevent crimes against humanity and genocide, with the hope of one day achieving a world free of terrorism, antisemitism, racism, and all forms of discrimination.<sup>13-16</sup>

Leading universities, such as yours, should set an example by disseminating these important messages.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*This letter is signed by Nobel laureates whose names appear below.*

Professor Aaron Ciechanover, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2004

Professor Avram Hershko, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2004

Professor Daniel Kahneman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, 2002

Professor Roger D. Kornberg, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2006

Professor Michael Levitt, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2012

Professor Dan Shechtman, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2011

Professor Ada Yonat, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 2009

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