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To: Professor Michael Spence, Vice-Chancellor  
Cc: Members of University Senate  
Members of Academic Board

June 3, 2009

- **Please cancel institutional arrangements between the University of Sydney and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Technion University, Haifa;**
- **Please support visits by Palestinian academics and students instead.**

Dear Professor Spence,

I am writing to you on behalf of myself, of the Council of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and of those undersigned, including some who attended a public meeting held in the University on May 7<sup>th</sup>, titled, 'After Israel's attack on Gaza, how do we work for peace and justice?'

The meeting heard a call from one of the speakers, Honorary Professor John Docker, for academics present to support the academic boycott of Israel organised by PACBI, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

This campaign has been organised in recognition of:

- Israel's persistent flouting of international law and abuse of Palestinian human rights;
- The reticence of governments to insist on norms of international law being enforced and to discharge their responsibilities under court rulings such as those of the International Court of Justice;
- The complicity of Israeli universities by defending, taking part in or remaining silent over, Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people;
- The opportunity and responsibility for individuals, institutions and associations globally to apply their own sanctions as a means of raising the social, economic and political cost of a recourse to aggression and abuse.

It should be noted that there is no claim that Israel is alone in this conflict in breaches of international law. In an article commissioned by the International Peace Research Association, however, I discuss the call for a special War Crimes Tribunal to be set up, adding: "the disparity of casualty figures means it would be a travesty of justice if the allegations against Israel were not its main focus". I quote the distinguished international juror, Professor Richard Falk, who is UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Palestinian Occupied Territories:

“These two sides should not be viewed as equally responsible for the recent events. Israel initiated the Gaza campaign without adequate legal foundation or just cause, and was responsible for causing the overwhelming proportion of devastation and the entirety of civilian suffering. Israeli reliance on a military approach to defeat or punish Gaza was intrinsically ‘criminal’, and as such demonstrative of both violations of the law of war and the commission of crimes against humanity”.

Neither does the call for an academic boycott, along with the wider campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, entail overlooking breaches of international law or abuses of human rights by other countries. It is not ‘applying double standards’. In the words of the writer, Naomi Klein, “Boycott is not a dogma; it is a tactic. The reason the strategy should be tried [on Israel] is practical: in a country so small and trade-dependent, it could actually work”. The general responsibility to act is particularised, in this case, by the opportunity to do so effectively.

It should be further noted that the campaign for an academic boycott of Israel is focused on preventing formal contacts and arrangements between institutions, not individuals. For example, as Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, I recently arranged a talk in University premises by Professor Jeff Halper of the Israel Campaign Against House Demolitions, and there is no suggestion that such visits arranged between individual academics should cease.

The meeting noted the arrangement advertised in an email circular from the University’s Research Office, as below:

**Reminder: Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund Fellowships**

The University of Sydney and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have established an agreement to encourage mutual visits by academic staff.

For more information about the Fellowships and application details, please contact: Sue Freedman-Levy, Administrative Officer, Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund, telephone (02) 9351 6558 or via the email address below.

**Email:** [sueflevy@anatomy.usyd.edu.au](mailto:sueflevy@anatomy.usyd.edu.au)

Closing date: **10 April 2009.**

This does cross the line from individual contacts to an arrangement between institutions, being part of a formal Program of Academic and Student Exchange between the University of Sydney and the Hebrew University, “re-ratified in 2001” according to the Sir Zelman Cowen Fund’s web page. We are therefore writing to ask you to cancel this agreement forthwith.

It may be noted that in 2005 the Hebrew University of Jerusalem obtained a letter from al Quds University in East Jerusalem, opposing a boycott. However this has been superseded by al Quds University’s decision, since the attack on Gaza, to join PACBI’s call for a boycott on all Israeli academic institutions. Furthermore, a substantial part of the Hebrew University campus is on land which is recognised in international law as rightfully belonging to Palestinian families expelled by Israel shortly after the start of its military occupation of the territory, in 1968. Both in general and in particular, therefore, the Hebrew University should be seen as complicit in the occupation and its consequences.

This call to sever institutional links with Israeli universities also applies to the scheme for the exchange of medical students with Technion University, Haifa, supported by a

scholarship fund from the Technion Society. We also ask you, therefore, to cancel this arrangement with immediate effect.

Many at the meeting expressed dissatisfaction at the notion of *merely* boycotting Israeli academic institutions. There were strong calls for this negative action – refraining from doing something – to be joined by positive action. The onerous conditions of life under military occupation for Palestinian civilians bear equally on the academy. We are therefore writing to request that you, as Vice-Chancellor, approach the University's donor community with an appeal to fund, instead, a program of Academic and Student Exchange with a Palestinian university.

To confer this honour on a Palestinian university would also bring honour on the University of Sydney. It would be of practical help in assisting Palestinian universities to maintain strong connections with the international academic community, something they find increasingly difficult. It would give staff, students and the wider university community here the opportunity to hear and consider important perspectives. It would also send a message to the community at large that the University is concerned to take whatever positive steps it can to support colleagues who are struggling to maintain academic life in extremely difficult circumstances.

Senior university colleagues join me in endorsing this request to you, as listed below, along with others named, who attended the public meeting, or gave their support later, and the Council of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Jake Lynch

And on behalf of University of Sydney academic colleagues:

Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees  
Honorary Professor John Docker  
Professor Frank Stilwell  
Professor Jocelyn Chey  
Professor Ann Curthoys  
Associate Professor Ahmad Shboul  
Dr Kenneth Macnab  
Dr Antonio Castillo  
Dr Evan Jones  
Dr Elizabeth Rechniewski  
Dr Nijmeh Hajjar  
Dr Charlotte Epstein  
Dr Bill Dunn  
Dr Tim Anderson  
Dr Melinda Cooper  
Dr Robert Hunter  
Annie Herro

And others who attended our meeting or added their support later:

Dr Hannah Middleton  
Dr Ariel Salleh  
Coral Hauenstein  
Keryn Scott  
Magdaline Shenton-Kaleido  
Nadia Fried  
Stewart Mills  
Rami Meo  
Joanna Blachowska  
Lyn Dickens  
Maria Giannacopoulos  
Patrick Langosch  
Gill Burrows  
Abe Quadan  
Anne Picot  
Peter Griffin  
Estelle Hinds  
Renate Watkinson  
Thomas Barnes  
Anthea Vogl  
Mehmet Ozalp  
Rose Nakad