



Professor Alon Chen

PRESIDENT

December 6, 2023

Dear President Claudine Gay,

As President of the Weizmann Institute of Science, an Israeli institution of scientific research and higher education, as well as an Israeli and a Jew—and as a human being—I was appalled to hear your testimony yesterday in the U.S. Congress. Your inability to answer ‘yes’ to the question of whether calling for the genocide of Jews violates Harvard’s code of conduct or rules regarding bullying or harassment is shocking and disgraceful. While I do not doubt that you as individuals are not antisemitic, your public testimony sheds a very dark shadow on your leadership and the institutions you represent.

The antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment on your campus, which was festering beneath the surface prior to October 7 and emerged with force following the barbaric attacks by the Hamas terrorist organization on Israel that day, doesn’t start and end with your students and faculty. It is now obvious that your profound lack of moral leadership on this matter is also to blame. You have failed in your obligation to ensure your Jewish and Israeli students are not subject to a hostile campus environment.

I am quite certain that if you were asked the same question about calls for genocide of any other minority, your response would have been different—an immediate ‘yes’. Taking a firm stand against calls for the murder or genocide of any minority, or any group for that matter, is the only acceptable stance; there is no space for contextualizing or justifying any calls for the intentional killing of an individual or group of individuals based on their race, nationality, or ethnicity.

Elite university campuses including yours are ostensibly the world’s bastions of knowledge and truth, and places where healthy debate and freedom of speech should be welcomed and protected. The responsibility lies squarely on you, as a university head, to define the lines between free speech and hate speech, and between the importance of speaking out for truth and justice versus promoting hypocrisy or falsehoods. Yet support for the Hamas attacks and language promoting the elimination of Israel and the Jewish people have found a welcome home on your campus in recent weeks.

This congressional hearing was an opportunity to take a firm stand against that dangerous tide. But if you, as President, are unable to unequivocally state that calls for Jewish genocide—the purposeful elimination of the Jewish people—violate your code of conduct,

+972 (0)8-934-3951

PRESIDENT@WEIZMANN.AC.IL

234 HERZL STREET, P.O. BOX 26, REHOVOT, 7610001 ISRAEL

weizmann.ac.il

the implication is nothing less than the moral and ethical bankruptcy of your leadership and your institution.

Taking a clear position, and hopefully not just in words to please a dismayed audience but with real understanding and belief, is expected at a bare minimum. I believe that we as leaders of institutions of higher education and research have a responsibility and obligation to use our privileged platforms to fine-tune the moral compass of our respective campuses, guiding our respective faculty and students to distinguish right from wrong, and to stand up for what is right. Given that other colleges and universities take a cue from your leadership and otherwise respected institution, the ripple effects of your words and the implications for society should not be underestimated.

On a final note, Israel is at war against a vicious terror organization, and the country is experiencing the most difficult moment in its history. The pain and loss have been felt on university and college campuses across Israel, and indeed a number of university students are still being held hostage by Hamas and denied visits of the Red Cross. All those who care about Israel are in deep distress. For a country that was built on the foundations of higher education and research and whose academics have extensive and fruitful ties with your faculty and campus, your testimony yesterday is met with profound disappointment at this particular time.

I'll close with a quote from Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the first President of the State of Israel and the founder of the Weizmann Institute of Science. On March 1, 1943, on a visit to the U.S., speaking at Madison Square Garden in New York, he said this: "When the historian of the future assembles the black record of our days, he will find two things unbelievable: first, the crime itself [the Holocaust]; second, the reaction of the world to that crime... The historian will not be able to understand why the conscience of the world had to be prodded, why sympathies had to be stirred."

In the interest of advancement and progress, I invite you to visit Israel and the Weizmann Institute of Science, which would present us with an opportunity for discussion.



Prof. Alon Chen and the Weizmann Institute management