



Prof. Rivka Carmi
President
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

RE: Backing of Ben Gurion University leadership in violation of freedom of speech

Dear Prof. Carmi,

We appeal to you as president of Ben Gurion University (BGU) to put an end to the unacceptable behavior of the university's security division, as well as to the repeated harassment and violation of your students' freedom of speech as carried out by university employees.

In a piece that aired on Channel 2 News last night, we saw BGU's security division, including its senior officials, harassing students who stand at the gates of the university, distributing leaflets supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state. This harassment occurred at the **exact same place and under the same circumstances** that other students are allowed, without interference, to hand out posters decrying the evacuation of Jewish settlements from the West Bank or to distribute fliers calling for student participation in the Jerusalem Day Flag Parade (a procession, held two weeks ago, through Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem that included racist slurs such as "Death to the Arabs" and "Muhammad is Dead.")

Of course we have no complaint against the university for allowing right-wing activists to distribute posters on university grounds. This is an exercise *par exemplar* of "freedom of speech, enabling intellectual pluralism and the free exchange of ideas, which is essential for the flourishing of scientific and academic thought" (AC 1332/08 **Tamuz Itai v. Tel Aviv University**). But for this very reason, we must vigorously protest the discriminatory approach of the university against the free speech of its students on the Left, illustrated in no uncertain terms by the news coverage last night. The gravity of the situation is in no way mitigated by those incidents during which the university has, without justification, limited the freedom of speech of student activists on the Right.

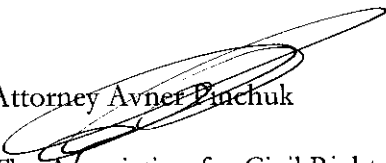
Regardless of political orientation, this is not the first time that the Ben-Gurion University Security Division has flagrantly and egregiously squelched free political speech, especially against ideas that are outside "the greater national and public consensus" (see for example case 2085/07 **Doitscher and ACRI v. Ben-Gurion University**). Nevertheless, in last night's news broadcast, we witnessed a new low. In the university's official aired response to the news item, it gave full, unqualified backing to the Security Division and its actions, as a body that "faithfully protects the welfare and security of university employees and students, and acts in accordance with the guidelines of the university administration." Your response ends with the convivial statement that

“security officials will continue to ensure that the university campus expresses the values of equality and democracy, while enabling it to be a campus teeming with life.”

We are gravely concerned that, in your eyes, the clear political bias demonstrated by the Security Division and its deleterious effect on students' freedom of speech serves to ensure "the values of equality and democracy." We are troubled that you have not even rejected the profanities shouted by some of these security officials in breaking up demonstrations by Arab students, such as: “Bust his skull. F**k him... Leftist a**hole.” Are such expressions and the motivations underlying them also “in accordance with the guidelines of the university administration”? Do you honestly believe that security officials' crudeness and brazen lies (see, for example, the guard denying his documented discriminatory statements who then had the nerve to call a student filing a complaint against him a “liar”) serve to ensure “a campus teeming with life”? What sort of life?

We call on you to retract your support for this ongoing harassment, in favor of the values of democracy and fundamental protected freedoms. We further call on you to take concrete steps, including investigations with possible disciplinary implications for personnel, in order to ensure that Ben-Gurion University is truly “a campus teeming with life” that fosters the values it professes to, as an institution of higher learning.

Sincerely



Attorney Avner Pinchuk

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)

Cc:
Minister Gideon Saar, The Council for Higher education