

LDB and StandWithUs Urge University to Condemn Mistreatment of Israeli Lecturer

November 16, 2015, Washington, D.C.: On Friday, The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law (LDB) and StandWithUs issued a joint letter to President Eric W. Kaler of the University of Minnesota expressing concerns regarding free speech and anti-Semitism at the law school. [LDB](#), a national civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C., is best known for its work fighting anti-Semitism in higher education. [StandWithUs](#), an international non-profit Israel education organization, is dedicated to informing the public about Israel and to combating extremism and anti-Semitism.

The letter was based on the following: Two weeks ago, Moshe Halbertal, an Israeli scholar and professor at New York University School of Law and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was invited to speak at the University of Minnesota Law School to discuss the ethics of war. Anti-Israel extremist protestors, including some University of Minnesota students, stormed the lecture and began yelling anti-Israel slurs for nearly forty-five minutes. The protestors chanted, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free,” and called for the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel. Their actions made it impossible for Professor Halbertal to deliver his lecture, and it was only after police removed the protestors and locked the doors to prevent more protests that Professor Halbertal could proceed. Several of the protestors were reportedly arrested for disturbance of a public meeting.

LDB and StandWithUs respect the rights of all members of a university community to express their opinions in accordance with the First Amendment but maintain that prohibiting another from expressing his or her views is a violation of that person’s free speech. In their joint letter, LDB and StandWithUs urged the President of the University of Minnesota to condemn this violation of free speech and explain how such actions can cross into anti-Semitism in a strong public statement; to further investigate the actions of the student and student groups involved; and to follow up with the prosecutor’s office to ensure that students who allegedly committed a misdemeanor are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

“We are very concerned with this assault on free speech at the University of Minnesota,” [LDB President Kenneth L. Marcus](#) commented, “especially that it has occurred at an excellent institution where we are proud to have a new and vibrant law student chapter. Just last month, I was pleased to deliver a presentation at the University of Minnesota Law School, and I found the students to be first-rate and the administrators to be quite thoughtful. The University of Minnesota community deserves better than the sort of behavior that has just occurred.”

Roz Rothstein, CEO of StandWithUs, added, “This incident is reminiscent of when Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren tried to speak at UC Irvine in 2010 and anti-Israel protestors prevented him from doing so in violation of California law. Those students were prosecuted and found guilty for their actions. While students have a right to voice their opinions, that does not mean they may do so in violation of the law and at the expense of others’ free speech rights.”

The full text of the letter can be found below:

Dear President Kaler,

We write on behalf of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law (LDB), a national public interest advocacy organization established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all, and StandWithUs, an international non-profit Israel education organization. We fight campus anti-Semitism through legal advocacy, and often work with university administrators nationwide to offer best practices on how to combat and prevent anti-Semitism on their campuses. StandWithUs is active with undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota, and LDB is active with law students at the University of Minnesota Law School. LDB President Kenneth L. Marcus spoke at the law school several weeks ago, and was very impressed with your colleagues and students. We write to you today because our students have expressed concerns regarding free speech and anti-Semitism at the law school.

Last week, the University of Minnesota Law School invited Moshe Halbertal, an Israeli scholar and renowned professor at New York University School of Law and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to speak on the ethics of war. Anti-Israel extremist protestors, including University of Minnesota students, stormed this lecture, yelling anti-Israel slurs for nearly forty-five minutes and rendering it impossible for Professor Halbertal to deliver his lecture. Protestors called for the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel, with chants such as, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” calling for a Palestinian State within the current borders of State of Israel and built upon the murder or expulsion of the six million Israeli Jews who currently live in the State of Israel. Finally, after police removed each of the protestors and locked the doors to prevent more protests, Professor Halbertal was able to proceed. It is our understanding that several of the protestors were arrested for this disturbance of a public meeting.

While we respect the right of all members of the university community to express their opinions in accordance with the First Amendment, prohibiting another from expressing his or her views is a violation of that person’s free speech. Furthermore, while it is legitimize to criticize the State of Israel and its policies, blatantly calling for Israel’s destruction may cross the line into anti-Semitism according to the U.S. State Department’s definition ([see attached](#)). We worry that the ensuing silence from your administration on this incident may be interpreted as tacit approval of hateful—and, since some of the demonstrators were arrested, illegal—speech. As a result, we suggest the following:

- 1) When speakers engage in hateful speech, administrators can use such situations as teachable moments and issue a strong public statement, reiterating the values of the campus community and showing the administration’s support of targeted or affected students. The best such responses tend to share certain characteristics, such as responding with specificity, prominence, balance, and courage; putting the event into context; following up and firmly applying sanctions; and providing outreach to the targeted group. This is discussed in LDB’s “Best Practice Guide for Combating Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israelism” ([see attached](#)). We urge you to issue a strong statement condemning the actions of the protestors and to label their activity as not only a violation of freedom of speech but also as crossing the line into possible anti-Semitism.

2) We urge you to investigate the actions of the students and student groups involved in this protest. If you find that the facts indicate that students have violated the University of Minnesota Student Handbook, we urge you to take appropriate disciplinary action.

3) We urge you to follow up with the prosecutor's office and to ensure that students who allegedly violated the law are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Thank you in advance for your prompt reply and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Kenneth L. Marcus
President & General Counsel
The Louis D. Brandeis Center
for Human Rights Under Law
kimarcus@brandeiscenter.com

Aviva J. Vogelstein
Staff Attorney

The Louis D. Brandeis Center
for Human Rights Under Law
avogelst@brandeiscenter.com

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About The Louis D. Brandeis Center: The Louis D. Brandeis Center, Inc., or LDB, is an independent, nonprofit organization established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. The Brandeis Center conducts research, education, and advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses. It is not affiliated with the Massachusetts University, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice. For more information, contact Michelle Yabes at myabes@brandeiscenter.com, or find us at [our website](#).

About StandWithUS: StandWithUs is an international, non-profit organization that believes that education is the road to peace. StandWithUs is dedicated to informing the public about Israel and to combating the extremism and anti-Semitism that often distorts the issues. They believe that knowledge of the facts will correct common prejudices about the Arab-Israeli conflict, and will promote discussions and policies that can help promote peace in the region. Through print materials, speakers, programs, conferences, missions to Israel, campaigns, social media and internet resources, StandWithUs ensures that the story of Israel's achievements and ongoing challenges is told on campuses and in communities around the world. Based in Los Angeles, StandWithUs has sixteen offices across the U.S., Canada, Israel and in the UK.

Kenneth L. Marcus
President & General Counsel

The Louis D. Brandeis Center
for Human Rights Under Law
1717 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 1025
Washington, DC 20006