

LDB Law Students Petition in Support of Embattled Texas Law Professor

November 25, 2015, Washington, D.C: This morning, students at eighteen United States law schools issued a statement in support of Dr. Ami Pedahzur, an Israel Studies professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Pedahzur had been assailed by anti-Israel activists for his effort to host an academic presentation on the Israeli Defense Forces. The law students wrote on behalf of [eighteen chapters](#) of the [Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law \(LDB\)](#), a national civil rights organization best known for its work fighting anti-Semitism in higher education. LDB's nationwide law student network helps support this mission.

"It is incredibly disappointing and frightening that the student protestors sought to intimidate and silence these speakers rather than engage with or challenge their ideas," said Cornell LDB law school chapter President Kate Sapirstein and Vice President Jaclyn Newman. "Such actions, we feel, go against the core aims of universities to foster open learning and a diverse spectrum of ideas."

In the petition, the students wrote: "As both law students and members of LDB chapters, we support Professor Pedahzur, and urge the University of Texas to publicly show support for Professor Pedahzur, to help promote a free and respectful exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that this disruption of free speech and expression does not recur in the future."

"We are proud of our law students for taking such initiative," says [LDB President Kenneth L. Marcus](#). "The attack on Dr. Pedahzur violates basic civility norms, and, more troublingly, represents a threat to academic freedom and the freedom of speech. I am glad that our law students are standing up against injustice and doing the right thing."

On Friday, November 13, Dr. Pedahzur, a Professor of Government and the Arnold S. Chaplik Professor in Israel and Diaspora Studies, hosted an event with Stanford University's Dr. Gil-Li Vardi, to present a study on, "The Origin of a Species: The Birth of the Israeli Defense Forces' Military Culture." Twelve members of a so-called "Palestine Solidarity Committee" reportedly disrupted the event, creating a human wall in the back of the room, not allowing the event to begin.

According to video evidence, anti-Israel activists tried to prevent the speaker from presenting her viewpoint by heckling her with canards such as "The IDF represents the ethnic cleansing of over 800,000 indigenous Palestinians." When Dr. Pedahzur and Dr. Vardi attempted to restore order and asked the protesters to listen to the presentation, the protesters insisted, "You are a former IDF soldier, we do not listen to you." Dr. Pedahzur repeatedly stated, "Sit down and listen, sit down and learn... Listen to a professor..." however the students would not cease their disruptions. Before leaving the room, the video shows students screaming a series of troubling chants: "Free Free Palestine!"; "Long live the Intifada!"; and "We want [19]48, we don't want two states!" Anti-Israel activists have subsequently launched a campaign to get Dr. Pedahzur fired.

The LDB law student statement follows a [letter](#) from LDB to UT Austin President Gregory L. Fenves last week, which charged that free speech at UT Austin was being imperiled by anti-Israel extremists, and urged action in support of Dr. Pedahzur. President Fenves wrote back that encouraging LDB to work productively with them to help promote a free and respectful exchange of ideas on campus.

On Monday, November 23, University of Texas at Austin College of Arts Dean Randy L. Diehl issued a statement, expressing his support for Dr. Pedahzur but indicating that reviews are still ongoing. Dean Diehl stated: "I wish to emphasize that there are places on campus for responsibly discussing disagreements. Disruption of a visiting scholar's invited academic lecture violates principles of academic freedom and free speech that are crucial to our mission as a great university." Dean Diehl also praised Dr. Pedahzur, his Institute for Israel Studies, and his courses.

LDB's Kenneth L. Marcus commented, "We applaud Dean Diehl's strong statement and hope that it reflects a continuing commitment to protect freedom of speech at the University of Texas."

THE FULL STATEMENT OF THE 18 LDB CHAPTERS:

November 25, 2015

On behalf of 18 chapters representing several hundred law students of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law (LDB), we support Professor Ami Pedahzur, Director of the Institute for Israeli Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and urge the University to address the upsetting disruption of free speech and expression that occurred on its campus on Friday, November 13. Specifically, an anti-Israel group, the Palestine Solidarity Committee, disrupted an event hosted by Dr. Pedahzur, titled "The Origin of a Species: The Birth of the Israeli Defense Forces' Military Culture," featuring Stanford professor Dr. Gil-Li Vardi.

At the event, the student disruptors showed no interest in engaging in dialogue or listening to the speaker. Rather, they argued that they refuse to talk to Israelis because they are all war criminals. They chanted things like, "Long live the Intifada!" and "We want [19] '48, we don't want two states!" It is incredibly disappointing and frightening that the protestors sought to intimidate and silence this speaker rather than engage with or challenge her ideas. Recently, there has been a trend of anti-Israel groups across the country attacking the free speech rights of pro-Israel speakers. Last week, LDB wrote to UT Austin President Gregory L. Fenves, urging him to remedy the situation. In his response letter, President Fenves wrote, "I encourage you to work productively with me to help promote a free and respectful exchange of ideas on campus." The actions of PSC go against the core aims of universities to foster open learning and a diverse spectrum of ideas. This is an opportunity for the University of Texas to be a nationwide leader in condemning attacks on free speech and standing up for what is right. As both law students and members of LDB chapters, we support Professor Pedahzur, and urge the University of Texas to publicly show support for Professor Pedahzur, to help promote a

free and respectful exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that this disruption of free speech and expression does not recur in the future.

Signed:

Cornell University School of Law, LDB Chapter
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, LDB Chapter
Brooklyn Law School, LDB Chapter
Chicago Kent College of Law, LDB Chapter
City University of New York (CUNY) Law School, LDB Chapter
DePaul University College of Law, Law LDB Chapter
Emory University School of Law, LDB Chapter
Loyola University of Chicago School of Law, LDB Chapter
Northeastern University School of Law, LDB Chapter
University of California – Berkeley School of Law, LDB Chapter
University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law, LDB Chapter
University of Chicago Law School, LDB Chapter
University of Minnesota Law School, LDB Chapter
University of Pennsylvania School of Law, LDB Chapter
University of St. Thomas School of Law, LDB Chapter
University of Virginia (UVA) School of Law, LDB Chapter
University of Washington School of Law, LDB Chapter
William Mitchell College of Law, LDB Chapter

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ABOUT THE LOUIS D. BRANDEIS CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER LAW

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 Kenneth L. Marcus at (202) 559-9296 or klmarcus@brandeiscenter.com, or find us at [our website](#).