

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

April 6, 2009

Mr. Abraham H. Foxman, National Director, and
Ms. Betsy Kellman, Regional Director, Michigan Region
Anti-Defamation League
605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158-3560

Dear Mr. Foxman and Ms. Kellman:

Thank you for your April 3 letter regarding your concerns about the announcement of Archbishop Desmond Tutu as the May 2009 Michigan State University commencement speaker.

You state in your letter that the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel announced March 30 the formation of an advisory board that includes Archbishop Tutu. As you know, MSU has been clearly and publically opposed to such a boycott. In 2007, I joined the presidents and chancellors of more than 200 U.S. universities in decrying a movement in the United Kingdom to support a boycott against Israeli academics and academic institutions.



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THE PRESIDENT

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As I stated at that time, the great universities of the United States were built on the bedrock of academic freedom. Michigan State University rejects the notion that free intellectual exchange and scholarly activities should be casualties of political disagreement. Our position has not changed.

Archbishop Tutu was invited to give MSU's commencement address last year. He accepted our invitation, but due to limitations of his travel schedule, he had to defer his visit until this year. We extended the invitation to Archbishop Tutu because he is a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and widely regarded as one of the most esteemed elder statesmen of the world.

Also, through the invitation, we honor the longstanding relationship between Michigan State University and South Africa, as well as with Africa as a whole, where we engage in outreach, research, and study abroad in more than half the continent's nations. We have deep connections with Africa, and it is our hope that these connections, and the positive outcomes they support, will be the focus of Archbishop Tutu's visit. Clearly, at the time we extended the invitation, he was not a member of the advisory U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. Be that as it may, as firmly as we

stand by our opposition to this movement, we stand by our invitation to Archbishop Tutu to address our university community.

We do so for the very same reason we reject an intellectual and academic boycott, because free speech truly is at the heart of academic freedom. Were we to rescind our invitation to Archbishop Tutu, as you suggest, unless he publically repudiates a position he has taken, we would violate this principle we hold so dear.

In the end, as I stated in the same 2007 message in which I voiced our opposition to the boycott, MSU believes a university may best bring about positive change in the world not by building walls and holding itself apart but by engaging. As we teach our students to tolerate and appreciate a diversity of intellectual approaches and viewpoints, even those with which they disagree, we reaffirm our commitment to being a place in which difficult conversations lead to growth and greater understanding.

As has been our past practice with any controversial speaker, we will provide opportunities for our campus community to hear alternate points of view. In this case, we will work with our Jewish Studies Program, MSU Hillel, and the broader Michigan Jewish community to develop these opportunities. We would welcome your suggestions, and I encourage you to follow up with Executive Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Board of Trustees Bill Beekman.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lou Anna K. Simon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Lou Anna K. Simon, Ph.D.
President