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April 3, 2009

Dr. Lou Anna K. Simon
Office of the President
Michigan State University
450 Administration Building
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

Dear President Simon:

We are concerned that Michigan State University has invited Archbishop Desmond Tutu to deliver the commencement address at graduation ceremonies this year.

We know you and the MSU community share our view that the free exchange of ideas among scholars should not be held hostage to political differences. As you noted in your July 31, 2007 Message From the President's desk explaining your decision to join President Bollinger and more than 200 other U.S. college and university presidents

“At issue is whether free intellectual exchange and scholarly activity should be casualties of political disagreements and whether the threat of withholding them is an appropriate tool. We say no.”

Archbishop Tutu has been a vocal and strident critic of Israel. At times, his statements about Israel have conveyed outright bigotry against the Jewish homeland and the Jewish people. While odious anti-Israel and anti-Jewish expressions would not disqualify him as a speaker on your campus, we believe you may not be aware of Archbishop Tutu's longstanding support for boycotting Israel.

The most recent example of Archbishop Tutu's deep involvement in the anti-Israel boycott effort is his participation in the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI). On March 30, 2009 the USACBI announced the formation of an Advisory Board which prominently includes Bishop Tutu as a member. The USACBI refers to Israel's "illegal occupation of Palestine and its apartheid system" and calls for "the complete academic and cultural boycott of Israeli academic institutions." By joining the USACBI Advisory Board, Archbishop Tutu has unequivocally endorsed an academic boycott based on ideas that are anti-Semitic and should be anathema to any institution of higher learning truly committed to academic freedom. A copy of the USACBI press release is enclosed.

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We urge MSU to uphold the principles you described to the MSU community in your 2007 message and which President Bollinger eloquently set out in the letter you and so many other campus leaders joined. In doing so, we ask you to reconsider the invitation extended to Archbishop Tutu unless he publicly repudiates the USACBI and its repugnant and blatantly anti-Semitic call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel.

Should you wish to discuss this very difficult issue with us, please call either of the undersigned.

Very truly yours,



Abraham H. Foxman
National Director



Betsy Kellman
Regional Director
Michigan Region

AHF/BK/ch



USACBI | 30 March 2009

Press Release: U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

In solidarity with the International Global Day of Action for Palestine, the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel announce the endorsement of over 300 US academics and cultural workers, and the affiliation of over 20 organizations.

The newly formed Advisory Board consists of internationally known scholars, artists and human rights activists:

Desmond Mpilo Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town

Hamid Dabashi, Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature, Columbia University

Bill Fletcher, Jr., Executive Editor, The Black Commentator and immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum

Glen Ford, Executive Editor, Black Agenda Report

Mark Gonzales, Educator, Poet, Human Writes Project

Marilyn Hacker, poet

Edward S. Herman, Professor Emeritus of Finance at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania

J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Associate Professor of American Studies and Anthropology, Wesleyan University

Robin D. G. Kelley, Professor of History, University of Southern California

Ilan Pappé, Chair in the Department of History, the University of Exeter and co-director of the Exeter Center for Ethno-Political Studies.

James Petras, Bartle Professor (Emeritus) of Sociology at SUNY Binghamton

Adrienne Rich, poet, essayist, activist

Michel Shehadeh, Executive Director, Arab Film Festival

Lisa Taraki, Associate Professor of Sociology, Birzeit University, Palestine and a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

As educators of conscience, we have been unable to stand by and watch in silence Israel's indiscriminate assault on the Gaza Strip and its educational institutions and its ongoing illegal occupation of Palestine. In response to the call of Palestinian civil society organizations and in solidarity with the growing international movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel, USACBI renews its call for the complete academic and cultural boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

A major element of the occupation and the blockade has been the destruction of Palestinian culture and of its institutions of education and the normalization of the occupation through academic business-as-usual and cultural "embassies". We therefore encourage our colleagues throughout the United States to join us in pursuing this non-violent means to end Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and its apartheid system by:

(1) Refraining from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions that do not vocally oppose Israeli state policies against Palestine;

- (2) Advocating a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions;
- (3) Promoting divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions;
- (4) Working toward the condemnation of Israeli policies by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic, professional and cultural associations and organizations;
- (5) Supporting Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or implicit condition for such support.

We believe that non-violent external pressure on Israel, in the form of an academic, cultural and economic boycott of Israel, can help bring an end to the ongoing massacres of civilians and an end the occupation of Gaza and Palestine. We therefore urge a comprehensive boycott, including divestment, political sanctions, and the immediate halt to all military aid, sales and deliveries to Israel. However, as educators of conscience, we specifically call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions as a key element in this larger action.

We urge our colleagues, nationally, regionally, and internationally, to stand up against Israel's ongoing scholasticide and to support the non-violent call for academic boycott, disinvestment, and sanctions.

This boycott should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

Details of the call, a list of endorsers, and further information can be found at: <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/>

To endorse, please e-mail uscom4acbi@gmail.com with your name and institutional affiliation.

Contacts:

Sherna Berger Gluck, shernagluck@gmail.com ; Jess Ghannam, jess.ghannam@ucsf.edu ; David Lloyd, colles2012@sbcglobal.net ; and Sunaina Maira, smaira@ucdavis.edu

For further information on the campaign, see: <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/>

Face Book and My Space: uscom acbi

Posted on 31-03-2009