



ICCJ Protests British Association of University Teachers Move to Boycott Israeli Universities

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The Reverend Dr John Pawlikowski, O.S.M., President of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), and Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Patron of the ICCJ, have issued the following statement:

The ICCJ expresses its grave concern at the recent motion carried in the British Association of University Teachers (AUT) to boycott certain universities and academics in Israel. It regards the proposed boycott as discriminatory, irrational, untimely and contrary to good community relations.

Firstly, the boycott is discriminatory in singling out Israel alone among all countries of the world for punitive measures. It pays no regard to other areas of the world whose populations are subject to far higher levels of oppression than those alleged against the State of Israel.

Secondly the boycott is irrational. It completely ignores the avowed aim of Palestinian terror groups to destroy the State of Israel. The responses to attacks on Israel are undertaken with the sole aim of combating the daily terrorist threat faced by Israel and her citizens, Arab and Jewish. The proposed boycott fails to take account of the context of the ongoing terror campaign waged against innocent civilians in Israel.

The boycott also ignores the position of academics in Israel's universities, who support the principles of open discourse and exchange of information. Freedom of speech and the inclusion of those dedicated to the pursuit of truth are basic values of academic life. Those values are undermined by boycotts of universities and of individual academics. Israel's universities have espoused political and racial tolerance, and upheld the principles of academic freedom. Most Israeli academics, Jews and Arabs alike, seek peace, dialogue and tolerance. The ICCJ particularly welcomes the joint statement issued last week by the Presidents of Hebrew University and Al-Quds University, both situated in Jerusalem, denouncing the proposed boycott, upholding the principles of academic freedom and urging cooperation based on mutual respect.

Thirdly, it is unreasonable to introduce sanctions against Israel at a time when there have been hopeful developments in the Middle East peace process. Palestinian and Israeli leaders alike have opened new channels of communication, and the Israeli government has announced that it intends to disengage from Gaza. These are highly significant and positive developments, entailing considerable levels of risk. All parties to the conflict need our commitment and support to help them realise their objectives, and the Church and other groups in civil society can play an important role in acting as a force for reconciliation.

Fourthly, we are concerned that a boycott targeting Israel reinforces concerns over antisemitism, which is increasing in many parts of Europe. Many of these attacks are linked to events in the Middle East, highlighting the very real dangers of unbalanced condemnations of Israel and

vilification of the Jewish State. Voicing opposition to Israeli Government policy is not of itself anti-Semitic. But criticism which demonises and de-legitimises the Jewish state alone, often by applying double standards, acts as a contributory factor to antisemitism. An academic boycott would not only affect the Jewish community, it would also have wider implications for community relations, particularly Christian-Jewish relations.

The ICCJ calls on the membership of the AUT to reverse last month's vote in favour of this boycott.

At a special meeting on 26 May 2005, the Association of University Teachers repealed the boycott. [See Reuters dispatch.](#)