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Hebrew University's Response to the University of Amsterdam

We regret the University of Amsterdam's decision not to continue its student exchange program with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. While we welcome the possibility of renewing our agreement, we are concerned by inaccuracies underlying this decision and by the lack of fair hearing and dialogue that precipitated it.

1. The Hebrew University is home to a diverse, international and interreligious academic community, whose commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech is manifested daily on campus. Since 7 October, Israeli and Palestinian students and faculty experienced terrible losses. Notwithstanding the immense pain on both sides, demonstrations on campus were kept peaceful and freedom of expression was maintained for all.
2. The Hebrew University is also deeply committed to peace-building, and has broke new grounds in this area. [The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace](#) is the Middle East's first and leading center for studying conflict resolution. [The Minerva Center for Human Rights](#) is at the forefront of human rights research and education. Our innovative programs—such as [Multiversitas](#) courses for diverse student groups and as [The Medium](#) and [Hasoub on Campus](#) for Arab entrepreneurs—nurture dialogue and collaboration in a multicultural society. UvA is worried about human rights violations. Nothing can be further from reality.
3. Denying student exchange is counter-productive. There is no better place for Dutch students to learn about this conflict firsthand, from Jewish and Palestinian professors, and alongside classmates of many nationalities. Furthermore, UvA's decision penalizes Israeli students only because of their nationality and blocks the invaluable opportunity for a dialogue across borders and experiences, upon which academic life is founded.
4. Unfortunately, UvA's decision plays into the hands of the academic boycott movement, which treats academia as a political weapon, warfare by other means. While we understand the burden of navigating tensions on campus, succumbing to the boycott is succumbing to bullying and discrimination.

Mixing academia and politics has devastating implications. It corrupts academic decisions, which now turn on the salience of the protest rather than on objective criteria. The UvA decision was made without reference to general standards or to an established ethical framework, no systematic review of partnerships was conducted, no serious fact-finding, and most jarringly – the Hebrew University, despite a collaboration that spans decades, was not consulted or offered a fair hearing.

5. Let us state the simple facts. The Hebrew University is an independent research institution, which is no more responsible for the policies of the Israeli government or military than UvA is responsible for the Dutch government or military. Our programs that enroll IDF soldiers are purely academic, regular degree programs, and operate without any military involvement. This, and other issues, could have been clarified—had we been asked.

6. As knowledge institutions, our response as academics to the brutality of war should never be to cut ourselves from one another, to cease teaching and research, but to double down on our collaborations amidst the raging storm.

As one of our Palestinian students [recently wrote](#): “Every Monday, when I show up for class, I get a vivid illustration of what the future could be. When I was younger, Hebrew University seemed off-limits to Palestinians; even just walking by the campus gates felt disloyal. But these days, the student population is nearly 20 percent Arab, and there are many young women wearing hijabs. ... These young people, who know how to work so well together, who know how to give and take, already know how to be neighbors.”

In this spirit, we at the Hebrew University are looking forward to work together with our longtime partners at UvA and renew our student exchange program, for our students – and for the promise of a better future.

Prof. Asher Cohen, President

Prof. Tamir Sheafer, Rector