

December 10, 2013

Dear Joshua,

Thank you for sending me your resolution and for your offer to engage in conversation. I believe that through discussion, as Hillel the Elder believed, comes learning that is meaningful and inspiring.

However, unlike your email, which invites discussion and is welcome, your resolution simply states that the students at Swarthmore Hillel “will host and partner with any speaker at the discretion of the board, regardless of Hillel International’s Israel guidelines.” This position is not acceptable.

Hillel’s Israel guidelines, which were developed carefully with a broad coalition of our organization’s stakeholders, state: “Hillel welcomes a diversity of student perspectives on Israel and strives to create an inclusive, pluralistic community where students can discuss matters of interest and/or concern about Israel and the Jewish people in a civil manner.” Hillel is also, as the guidelines state, “steadfastly committed to the support of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state with secure and recognized borders as a member of the family of nations.”

In summary, while welcoming debate on the many important and difficult questions that Israel faces, a debate that is vigorous in Israel as well, Hillel International does draw a line. That line is as follows: “Hillel will not partner with, house or host organizations, groups or speakers that as a matter of policy or practice: Deny the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish and democratic state with secure and recognized borders; Delegitimize, demonize or apply a double standard to Israel; Support boycott of, divestment from, or sanctions against the State of Israel; Exhibit a pattern of disruptive behavior towards campus events or guest speakers or foster an atmosphere of incivility.”

I hope you will inform your colleagues on the Student Board of Swarthmore Hillel that Hillel International expects all campus organizations that use the Hillel name to adhere to these guidelines. No organization that uses the Hillel name may choose to do otherwise.

Your resolution further includes the statement: “All are welcome to walk through our doors and speak with our name and under our roof, be they Zionist, anti-Zionist, post-Zionist, or non-Zionist.” This is simply not the case. Let me be very clear – “anti-Zionists” will not be permitted to speak using the Hillel name or under the Hillel roof, under any circumstances.

Hillel recognizes, of course, that “organizations, groups or speakers that as a matter of policy or practice” violate these guidelines may well be welcomed on campus, according to the policies of the particular college or university. The Hillel on campus, however, may not partner with or host such groups or speakers. This is entirely within our discretion as an organization, and we have clearly stated our intention to make these important decisions to protect our values and our critically important mission. Just as the university decides who will teach classes, and what organizations it will allow on campus, so Hillel will decide who will lead discussions in programs it sponsors and with whom it will partner.

In one of your resolution’s clauses, you invoke “the values espoused by our namesake, Rabbi Hillel, who was famed for encouraging debate in contrast with Rabbi Shammai.” Rabbi Hillel was famed for his openness to others, and his leniency in legal interpretation to advance *tikkun olam* – “repairing the world.” This spirit is strong in today’s American Jewry, and it is strong in the work of Hillel on every campus. However, Rabbi Hillel is perhaps more famous for his saying in *Pirke Avot*, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?”

We here at Hillel international hold firm to his legacy. We encourage debate and dissent, but we draw the line at hosting groups who would deny the right of the State of Israel to exist. We will stand with Israel, the democratic, open, pluralistic home of the Jewish people.

On that fundamental principle, we are unwavering.

Sincerely,



Eric D. Fingerhut