

May 2, 2024

Dr. Martha E. Pollack
President, Cornell University

Dear President Pollack:

Last November, you convened a group of alumni and others with significant experience in public affairs, religious studies, interfaith engagement, Middle East politics and other relevant areas of expertise as an external advisory group to provide an independent assessment of the University's response to the challenges of antisemitism as well as anti-Muslim and other forms of hatred on campus and to offer ideas and recommendations to assist you in this effort. It is our hope and intent that our recommendations be helpful in addressing forms of bigotry, bias and discrimination against any member of the Cornell community.

Over the last four months, our group has met frequently with you on zoom to discuss these issues, as well as with members of your leadership team and external legal advisors. In all these sessions, we have had the opportunity to engage in unscripted, free-flowing and confidential dialogue, posing a broad and unrestricted range of questions with no topic off-limits.

In addition, we met with a diverse cross-section of Cornell students – including those active in elected campus leadership for undergraduate and graduate students, those prominent in major social and cultural organizations and those who serve in leadership roles of Cornell's Jewish and Israel-related groups and its Arab and Muslim-related groups. These off-the-record conversations gave us a deeper understanding of the campus environment and the challenges many students have faced, especially since the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Hamas-Israel war.

Our group has also spent considerable time talking amongst itself, discussing the various aspects of the challenges facing Cornell and the University's response to them.

Our observations, conclusions and recommendations flow from all these discussions. We should note that our deliberations all occurred before the most recent campus protests, events which only underscore the importance of developing a long-term, sustainable strategy to counter bias, bigotry and hatred, based on broad consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders in the Cornell

community. We present this letter in the hope its contents are useful in strengthening Cornell's efforts to counter religious and ethnic bias, bigotry and hate while advancing its core mission as a community committed to academic excellence and learning.

At the outset, we applaud your commitment to the principle of zero-tolerance for antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry, and all other forms of ethnic- and religious-based bias, discrimination and hatred. We commend the seriousness and consistency with which you have led the University's response to the alarming incidents of antisemitism and Islamophobia since October 7. You have made it clear that your stance is both personal to you and reflected in longstanding Cornell University policies. That is a critical foundation upon which to build.

Cornell rightfully prides itself on being a community dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, where all students should feel safe to pursue their passions and interests free from bigotry, bias or hate. For this reason, we were deeply moved by the comments of those Jewish students whose experience at Cornell has been marred by a sense of vulnerability and ongoing disruption of their educational experience. We were similarly saddened by the comments of those Arab and Muslim students whose experience has been tarnished by a feeling of unfairness and inequity. Both groups expressed dismay at what they perceived to be inconsistent application of the rules about protests.

It is important to state that while we are cognizant of the fact that antisemitism has unique characteristics (as do other forms of bias, bigotry and hate), we are convinced that we will be more successful in our efforts to counter each of these threats when we dedicate ourselves to countering them all. This will require a combination of specific antisemitism and broader anti-bias, anti-bigotry and anti-hate responses.

In this effort, we believe that a firm commitment to free and open expression – which, of course, does not extend to threat, harassment or calls to violence – is an ally. Indeed, we specifically reject the idea that one needs to compromise in the fight against bias, bigotry, discrimination and hatred in order to safeguard a commitment to free and open expression or vice versa. To the contrary, we believe these ideas are mutually reinforcing. We are heartened by the fact that in our dialogue with you, you share this approach and are firmly

committed to translating it into action to strengthen the resilience and vitality of the broader Cornell community.

In this regard, we have reviewed the initiatives underway at Cornell to address these challenges and consider them strong, appropriate and deserving of continued support. These include (but are not limited to) creating and hosting a special series of campus events on prejudice (<https://events.cornell.edu/addressing-prejudice/>); convening multiple ongoing meetings of Cornell senior administration with Jewish and Muslim student leaders; developing and offering new training to faculty on how to support challenging discourse in the classroom; adding a new undergraduate course on antisemitism and authorizing the hiring of two post-doctoral fellows in Holocaust studies and Israeli history and politics; adding new resource material on antisemitism and anti-Muslim bias to the University's DEI webpages; issuing new interim policies on expressive activity and anti-doxxing, with final versions pending further consultation and review (<https://policy.cornell.edu/policy-library/interim-expressive-activity-policy>; <https://policy.cornell.edu/policy-library/interim-anti-doxxing-policy>); and commissioning an external assessment of the University's security policies, practices and assets and implementing recommendations to improve it.

Based on our discussions and deliberations, we recommend these additional actions:

- Expand specialized programming for new students during orientation focusing on the importance of civil discourse and the need to combat anti-Jewish bias, bigotry and hatred and other forms of religious- and ethnic-based discrimination, including (but not limited to) anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and other forms of bias, bigotry and hatred. As part of this process, it is important to ensure that students have sufficient understanding of the mechanisms they can use when they encounter situations of bigotry, such as the bias reporting system. We urge you to find opportunities to provide this specialized programming for returning students and graduate students, too.

- Review the student survey mechanisms, such as the Cornell Undergraduate Experience (CUE) survey (<https://irp.dpb.cornell.edu/surveys/pulse-surveys>), to ensure that they are well-tuned to identifying student

experience with bigotry, bias and discrimination and that they fully ascertain any feelings by students of physical insecurity or lack of safety. Undertake special outreach to make sure as many students as possible complete these surveys.

- Dedicate additional resources toward programming that specifically addresses the origin, evolution and contemporary manifestation of antisemitism and other forms of bigotry, bias and hatred. Consider hiring additional faculty members and/or supporting post-doctoral fellows with expertise in antisemitism, Holocaust studies, Israel and Zionist history. Also, consider hiring additional faculty members and supporting post-doctoral fellows with expertise in the history and development of ethnic and religious hatred more broadly, including anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bias and bigotry. Extend this effort toward deepening Cornell's faculty and post-doctoral expertise in Palestinian history and politics, the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflicts and broader Middle East politics, culture and history.

- To provide guidance in the effort to understand and thereby counter antisemitism, adopt a statement akin to the following, to be posted in an appropriate place on Cornell's website (such as with the resources on antisemitism that appear on the "Belonging at Cornell" page):

As we work to combat antisemitism at Cornell, and consistent with the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism which states that various definitions of antisemitism "serve as valuable tools to raise awareness and increase understanding," we can usefully draw from the definitions and descriptions of antisemitism that have been developed, including the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition, which is the most widely used, as well as others, such as the U.S. National Strategy itself, NEXUS, and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. All of these can contribute to constructive dialogue, and to education and training for students, faculty and staff aimed at recognizing, preventing and combatting antisemitism.

- Invest resources in supplementing existing campus programming with additional opportunities for students to build trust and relationships across lines of political, cultural and religious difference, with a focus on promoting

civil discourse regardless of the depth of political or ideological dispute. Cornell, in its Cornell United Religious Work, its ILR School and other programs, has great expertise in negotiations and mediation, which should be drawn on for this work.

- Clarify policies around institutional support for speakers, events and the activities of student groups and determine whether there is a need for additional policies. This should include addressing questions such as the distinction between the University “allowing” and “endorsing” a speaker/event/group as well as clarifying criteria for when the “Cornell” name and logo are permitted; when and what sort of support -- financial, logistical, technical or otherwise -- should be provided; and who is responsible for issuing invitations and approving support. In defining these policies, we urge that the process of consultation with university stakeholders be as broad as possible and that the explanation of policies – including the potential implications of their violation – as clear and transparent as possible.
- Create a faculty group charged with considering whether (and if so, how) the rules governing professional standards for faculty should be revised regarding the use and impact of social media. This is a phenomenon that did not exist when the university’s current governing documents on this issue – the 1940 AAUP statement and Cornell’s 1960 faculty statement – were drafted. We recognize that any resulting statement of professional standards must be consistent with the responsibilities outlined in the university’s Statement on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech and Expression, university policies prohibiting unlawful discrimination or harassment, and the university’s ethical standards.
- Enhance engagement with concerned parents and alumni on issues of antisemitism and other forms of ethnic- or religious-based bias, bigotry and hatred. Consider establishing a group of engaged alumni that meets periodically to discuss these issues with you and/or other members of your administration to gain perspective into ways to counter these pernicious threats to the University community and to inform friends of the University about efforts underway on campus.

- Consider augmenting existing programming by organizing and hosting a high-level forum that brings scholars together with key political and civil society leaders to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and strategies to advance stability and peace in the Middle East in the aftermath of the current crisis. By leveraging Cornell’s convening power, its faculty expertise in relevant areas, including the vital contribution of the Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, as well Cornell’s strong relations with diplomats, government officials, military and economic experts, and civil society leaders both here and abroad, Cornell could both educate its students and make a signal contribution to the pursuit of peace and stability.

We hope that you and the broader Cornell community find value in these recommendations. We stand ready to provide further assistance on this matter, should you believe our contribution can be helpful. Thank you for the opportunity to be of service to Cornell.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Holtzman

Steve Israel

Emad Khalil

David Saperstein

Robert Satloff

Michael Ullmann