

MONTREAL: MCGILL UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS SIGN LETTER CONDEMNING BDS

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The letter was written as an endorsement of a statement condemning BDS issued by the university's Principal and Vice Chancellor Suzanne Fortier in February.

In yet another blow to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (BDS), more than 150 professors at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, signed an open letter condemning the organization.

“As academics who represent a wide range of political views and methodologies, we all know that open discourse is essential to the pursuit of truth. Boycotts and intellectual bullying have no place at McGill or at any other institution of higher learning,” the professors wrote.

The letter was written as an endorsement of a statement condemning BDS issued by the university's principal and Vice Chancellor Suzanne Fortier in February.

Fortier issued the statement following the rejection by McGill undergraduate students of an online ratification of a motion to support BDS earlier this year.

“As faculty members, past and present, who have devoted much of our professional lives to McGill, we are writing to tell you how proud we are of your courageous stance against the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement and for what you identified as ‘academic freedom, equity, inclusiveness and the exchange of views and ideas in responsible, open discourse,’” the letter said.

The professors criticized the BDS Movement for trying to “squelch speech and intimidate those who support Israel’s right to exist.”

“The BDS Movement repeatedly jumps from criticizing particular Israeli policies to delegitimizing the State of Israel. The July 2005 Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS quickly shifts from fighting ‘the occupation’ to demonizing Israel to rejecting Israel’s existence,” the letter stated.

The professors wrote that while they have many different opinions regarding Israel and supported a debate regarding its policies, the “tone and tactics of the BDS Movement echo traditional anti-Semitic obsessions and tropes.

“As educators, we are distressed when we hear our students telling us how uncomfortable they have been made to feel by an increasingly aggressive pursuit of the anti-Israel boycott, reflected by the repeated attempts to vote it in, no matter how many times the supporters fail,” they wrote.

During the process of the BDS student vote, there were numerous reports that Jewish McGill students said they felt unsafe at the university and were subject to anti-Semitic remarks in light of the vote.

“We all need to affirm our commitment to fighting bigotry of all kinds, even when masked behind human rights rhetoric or even if allied with political positions we might support. We fail when our students don’t feel genuinely safe in our university – and the BDS movement has made McGill students feel unsafe, unsupported, and unwelcome in their and our academic home,” the professors wrote.

The academics concluded the letter by thanking Fortier for “affirming the core principles of McGill” and said they are committed to “be vigilant in preserving the openness, tolerance, and civility” of the university.