



A Union of Professionals

## AFT News Release

For Immediate Release  
March 18, 2009

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### **PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A CORRECTED VERSION OF THE STATEMENT SENT EARLIER TODAY**

#### **Statement by Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers, On Proposed Academic Boycott of Israel**

**WASHINGTON**—In the aftermath of the war in Gaza, a number of Canadian and American professors and organizers have called for an academic boycott of Israel. These initiatives are similar to efforts by a group of British academics earlier this decade intended to block Israeli universities and professors from participating in academic conferences and other forums outside of Israel.

Modeled on these efforts, a group of California academics in January 2009 initiated its own call for an academic boycott of Israeli universities and scholars—the first we know of in the United States. Dubbing itself the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USCACBI,) the campaign’s declared goal is to pressure Israel to end its occupation and thereby “bring an end to the ongoing massacres of civilians and end the occupation of Gaza and Palestine.”

In 2002, the executive council of the American Federation of Teachers passed a resolution opposing such academic boycotts, calling them “anathema to academic freedom.” Since that time, the AFT has actively worked against academic boycott proposals aimed at Israel. Today, we want to reiterate that position. We believe academic boycotts were a bad idea in 2002 and are a bad idea now. Academic boycotts are inconsistent with the democratic values of academic freedom and free expression. In addition to opposing academic boycotts in principle, the AFT’s 2002 resolution objected to the rhetoric that accompanied the British academic boycott proposals, finding it to be one-sided and unsubstantiated. For example, the British proposals criticize only Israel, without mentioning any policies, statements or actions taken by the Palestinians—such as Hamas’ shelling of Israeli civilian targets or its unilateral breach of the cease-fire—that have exacerbated the conflict.

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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The AFT was not alone in its criticism of the earlier British academic boycott movement (which was directed solely at Israel). The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), among other major U.S. organizations and leaders, was outspoken in its opposition. In 2006, AAUP noted, “We especially oppose selective academic boycotts that entail an ideological litmus test.” Earlier this year, AAUP president Cary Nelson restated his organization’s opposition to academic boycotts. In 2007, nearly 300 American university presidents signed a public statement in opposition to academic boycotts. The author of that statement, Columbia University’s president Lee Bollinger, said, “If you boycott Israeli academics, you boycott us at Columbia.”

We want to make clear that this position does not in any way discourage an open discussion and debate of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or of ways to resolve it. However, we expect that such a discussion would not be one-sided and would consider the behavior of all the relevant actors. An academic boycott of Israel, or of any country, for that matter, would effectively suppress free speech without helping to resolve the conflict. An academic boycott is the complete antithesis of academic freedom; therefore, it should not be supported by any individual or institution that subscribes to this basic principle of higher education and, indeed, of democratic discourse.

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The AFT represents more than 1.4 million pre-K through 12th-grade teachers; paraprofessionals and other school-related personnel; higher education faculty and professional staff; federal, state and local government employees; nurses and healthcare workers; and early childhood educators.