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**Chancellor Richard Herman, University of IL - Urbana Champaign
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JERUSALEM, Israel- Last week I and thousands of others signed an online petition posted by Scholars for Peace in the Middle East in strong opposition to the May 30th vote by Great Britain's University and College Union (UCU) to advance an ill-conceived boycott of Israeli universities and academicians. The motion threatens the very essence of intellectual freedom. No wonder it was quickly condemned around the world by concerned citizens, Nobel Prize winners and prestigious academics, including the presidents of Columbia, New York University and University of California, Berkeley. Britain's own independent adjudicator for higher education Baroness Deech, labeled the boycott as "McCarthyite anti-intellectualism." Oxford University's UCU members have opposed the boycott.

Here at home, the Association of American Universities, of which the University of Illinois has been a member since 1908, has also urged defeat of the measure, stating, "Academic boycotts are inimical to the free exchange of ideas that is essential to academic freedom."

The boycott currently under discussion by UCU intends to punish an entire academic community for its government's policies. Scholarship and research must remain fluid and borderless, unconstrained by geopolitical boundaries and ideological disagreements. Advances in science, technology or the arts do not occur in a vacuum. In its "Universality of Science" statement, The International Council of Scientific Unions states, "Science is a co-operative exercise that thrives on open international interaction and exchange. It transcends national boundaries. In this sense, science is universal and when this universality is infringed or impeded it can have serious consequences for science and for society more broadly."

The statement was originally drafted between last century's world wars to prevent discrimination against German academics.

Here at Illinois we will never censor scholars, students or researchers based on their nation's policies. We will never waver from that commitment. And we value our deep and meaningful connections with all nations, including Israel. Our Israel Studies Program brings Israeli academics to campus, along with journalists and writers. The program promotes and supports the academic study of Jewish culture and society in the spirit of free and open inquiry. I write these words from Jerusalem. I am part of a delegation of educators-Jews and non-Jews-from the American Jewish Committee's Project Interchange, an organization whose very purpose is to promote exchange among the world's scholars, educators and politicians.

The irony is hardly lost on me.

We are studying and discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while concentrating on the challenges of higher education within Israeli and Arab societies.

In between discussions on tech transfer, potential partnerships, the challenges to Israeli and Palestinian higher education, and the related issue of the future of Jewish settlements, I have stood at the lookout point of Nebi Mari and looked out at Gaza, imagining a world without walls and checkpoints, suicide martyrs and child coffins. In this holy place with olive trees as old as ancient Rome I have been reminded of my obligation as an educator and as a human being. Change will only come through collaborations.

Most of what we read about the Middle East is about endless war and failed peace. Every day it seems we are witness to images of irreversible hatred and heartbreaking carnage. Yet on the streets of Haifa and in the classrooms of the Technion and Hebrew University, there is cause for optimism; the hope that education always brings. In this tiny country we see tradition and modernity intersecting often with great difficulty and amazing ease, whether in domiciles or in daily life.

At the Women's Center in the Bedouin community of Lakia, we heard what it means in terms of education to be a minority within a (Jewish) majority which itself is a minority within a region that is an Arab majority. And while the disparities were apparent optimism and passion were also in the air.

The same hopeful spirit resides in Al-Qasemi College, the first institute of Islamic higher education in Israel and a key lifeline that reaches out to local Arab women in an effort to educate them as citizens of the world.

We need to hear about these brave steps toward commonalities, too. They are a balm against fatalism.

My time here in Israel has moved me beyond these inadequate words but it does reinforce what I have always believed: To solve the complex challenges of our world we must cultivate collaborations while respecting our differences. Academic boycotts ultimately fail because knowledge and discovery cannot be contained. For all our faults, we remain a gregarious species and at this moment in time we need each other more than ever.