

Gillian Lester
Dean and the Lucy G. Moses Professor of Law
Columbia Law School

Dear Dean Lester,

As alumni of Columbia University graduate programs, including the Law School, we were disappointed to read your statement in support of Katherine Franke.

In your statement, you refer to the vital importance of “the global exchange of ideas and viewpoints” and object to “efforts to restrict such exchange.” We wholeheartedly concur.

Yet, we suggest your sentiments should be directed to Prof. Franke herself. Prof. Franke has been a vocal proponent of an academic boycott of Israel, as part of her broader support for comprehensive BDS (boycotts, divestment, and sanctions) against the State. As staff members at NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research institute, we have documented the chilling impact of these campaigns on free speech and expression, as well as the inherent discrimination that accompanies such activities.

For example, Franke participated as a panelist in the Spring 2016 “Apartheid Week” event, “[The Case for Academic Boycott](#) [of Israel],” held on the Columbia University campus. She also signed a pro-BDS “[Faculty Petition](#)” at Columbia and is [active](#) in a leading American pro-BDS campus group.

Additionally, during the abovementioned event in support of academic boycotts of Israel, Franke told an auditorium full of students **not** to study the Arab-Israeli conflict because it would entail traveling to Israel and studying in local institutions. Franke recommended that a student with such interests should change her research interests in order to comply with the academic boycott of Israel.

Franke similarly indicated in conversation with one of us that Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum and research center in Jerusalem, should similarly not be visited.

In 2016, over 200 Columbia faculty, including the former Dean of the Law School and numerous other professors from the Law School, signed a letter regarding the importance of maintaining ties with Israel. Barnard College President Sian Leah Beilock’s response to BDS on her campus just last month notes that Barnard would not divestment from Israel, and highlights the divisive environment caused by BDS campaigns.

It is unfortunate that your letter failed to convey these important messages.

Regards,

Anne Herzberg, J.D., Columbia Law School, 1998

Naftali Balanson, M.A., Graduate School of Arts and Science, 2004

Olga Deutsch, School of International & Public Affairs, 2002

Becca Wertman, M.A., Graduate School of Arts and Science, 2016