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August 1, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND USPS TO:

Embassy of Israel
3514 International Drive, N.W.
Washington, District of Columbia 20008

Minister of the Interior Aryeh Deri aderi@knesset.gov.il

Minister of Strategic Affairs Gilad Erdan gerdan@knesset.gov.il

Dear Minister Deri and Minister Erdan:

We write in regard to the interrogation, subsequent expulsion, and apparent banning from Israel of Columbia Law School Professor Katherine Franke in April of this year. It is our understanding that Professor Franke was expelled based on information that she is a supporter of the “Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions” (BDS) movement. However, as she attempted to explain to the immigration officer at the time of her interrogation, she was visiting Israel in her capacity as a scholar and civil rights leader, not as a supporter of BDS. Her plans included meeting with two graduate students whose dissertations she is supervising, meeting with a former Columbia fellow to discuss plans for a possible joint masters program in human rights, and meeting with colleagues at the Israeli NGO Adalah to make plans for Columbia’s Palestine and Law program for the next academic year.

The American Association of University Professors, founded in 1915, is the United States’ foremost organization dedicated to the principles of academic freedom. These principles require the free academic exchange that is so necessary for the growth of international scholarship and understanding. That is why our Association has since 2005 consistently opposed academic boycotts, including the academic boycott of Israel (see <https://www.aaup.org/report/academicboycotts>). We believe that, by aborting Professor Franke’s visit, your immigration officer acted in a manner that is inconsistent with such exchange. Such actions undermine efforts in the United States to oppose academic boycotts, including the academic boycott of Israel.

We are aware that Amendment No. 27 to the Entry Into Israel Law, passed in March 2017, bars entry by any individual who has “knowingly issued a public call to boycott the state of Israel,”

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“pledged to participate in said boycott,” or acted on behalf of a group or an organization that has done so. We strenuously object to both the Entry Into Israel law and Amendment 27 as efforts at censorship that contravene the standards of a free society and basic principles of academic freedom, and consequently exclude Israel from the international community of scholars. The guidelines issued by the Israeli Population and Immigration Authority specifically state that exceptions should be made where the harm resulting from denying entry is greater than the benefits. Where, as in Professor Franke’s case, the harm is to the precious ideal of academic freedom and global scholarly cooperation and exchange, and where the reasons for her trip had nothing to do with BDS, the balance tilts strongly in favor of allowing her entry.

This is only one case, but we believe it has grave implications for international academic exchange. We urge you to reconsider your immigration officer’s decision and to revoke any further ban on Professor Franke’s entry for purposes of collaborative academic and scholarly work in Israel. Many thanks for your consideration,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry Reichman". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Henry Reichman, Chair
Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure
American Association of University Professors

cc: Professor Katherine Franke, Columbia Law School
Professor Gillian Lester, Dean, Columbia Law School
Lee Bollinger, President, Columbia University