

July 5, 2016

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City university of New York

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona
Via email caf@mesana.org

Dear Profs. Baron and Newhall,

We received your letter and we would like to take this important opportunity to clarify several facts and put the issue in proper perspective:

- First of all, it is important to emphasize that the Berelson Prize Fund was given to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and not to a specific department. The donor did not appoint the Department of Middle East Studies to determine the prize winners.
- The original purpose of the fund was to bestow the prize on Ben-Gurion University students or faculty who were leaders in peace promotion. They were chosen by a committee that included, among others, the head of the Center for Understanding between Jews and Arabs – and the Dean of Students.
- Upon the retirement of the aforementioned head of the Center, the University transferred the fund to the Department of Middle East Studies, which bestowed the prize on a variety of personages who, in their judgement, promoted peace.
- No one is disputing that the role of academia is to encourage free, open and critical discourse on all topics, including those that are controversial. Ben-Gurion University has been and continues to be devoted to that role, strongly protecting free speech and academic freedom.
- Several weeks ago a “Whistleblowing through the Ages” conference was held at BGU, which examined the issue throughout history, and offered a platform for discourse about the multitude of views regarding this complex subject. Representatives of the “Breaking the Silence” organization were invited to speak on a panel at this conference, and delivered their remarks as planned, despite vociferous protests and uncompromising pressure brought to bear on the University and its president.
- At the same time, and without casting doubt on the University’s role as described above, awarding a prize is an act of recognition and appreciation which is tantamount to taking a stand and supporting the intended recipient. Such a stand does not fall under the mandate of the University which is comprised of individuals of varying points of view, and all the more so it is not part of the

mandate of a single department to make that determination in the name of an entire academic institution.

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev will continue to be a leading international institute of higher education and research, where free, open and critical discourse will always take place on any topic. That is how it has been since our founding and that is how it will always be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AEB', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Anne E. Berkeley
Director of the Office of the President
Executive Assistant to President Rivka Carmi M.D.