



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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February 18, 2013

Dr. Karen L. Gould
President, Brooklyn College
Brooklyn College
2900 Bedford Avenue
Brooklyn NY 11210

Dear Dr. Gould:

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), I am writing to express our strong support for your principled stance regarding the public forum on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign that took place at Brooklyn College on February 7, 2013. We applaud your decision to resist demands by a number of public officials and outside organizations that the college's Department of Political Science withdraw its sponsorship of the forum and that it be cancelled, and we commend your firm defense of the principles of academic freedom and of the autonomy and integrity of institutions of higher education.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The public event, entitled "BDS: Movement for Palestinian Rights," was organized by Students for Justice in Palestine, a student organization at Brooklyn College, and featured a Palestinian activist, Omar Barghouti, and an American philosopher, Judith Butler. We commend you for refusing to be intimidated by baseless allegations that the forum was illegitimate because it supposedly fostered anti-Semitism and hate speech, or by threats to the public funding on which Brooklyn College depends. As an academic organization MESA takes no position on the specific issues addressed at the February 7th event; but as a matter of principle we reject the assertion that, for example, criticism of the policies and practices of the State of Israel or advocacy of a Palestinian "right of return" in and of themselves constitute hate speech or manifest anti-Semitism. In any case, whatever one's opinion of the BDS campaign or of any other issue involving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is the role of the university to provide a space in which such contentious questions can be discussed and elucidated. This is exactly what Brooklyn College has done in this instance.

Your moral and professional clarity over the last few weeks has been exemplary, inspiring Mayor Bloomberg's warning to those who would restrict academic freedom so as to silence opinions with which they disagree that if they prefer educational institutions "where the government decides what kind of subjects are fit for discussion, I suggest you apply to a school in North Korea." We very much hope that other academic leaders will take note of your principled stance and will do their utmost to exercise vigilance in defense of academic freedom and of the autonomy of our institutions of higher education.

Sincerely,

Peter Sluglett
MESA President
Professor, Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore