



April 13, 2010

Dear ASUC Senate Member:

J Street, the political home of the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement, writes to support the Presidential Veto of the UC Berkeley bill in support of divestment passed on Wednesday March 17.

Our position is rooted in our strong opposition to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the expansion and entrenchment of settlements there, as well as our belief that efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be focused on achieving a two-state solution because that is crucial to Israel's future.

We determine our support for actions and advocacy campaigns related to Israel by whether they advance the possibility of achieving a two-state solution, under which the state of Israel – the democratic home of the Jewish people – and a sovereign, independent State of Palestine can live side-by-side in peace and security.

In this vein, we oppose, for instance, the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement (www.bdsmovement.net) which supports the right of return of Palestinian refugees to Israel and fails to draw a clear distinction between opposition to the post-1967 occupation and opposition to the existence of the state of Israel itself as the democratic home of the Jewish people. Even if it was not the intent of the students who drafted this bill, its passage is now being seized on by the global BDS movement as a victory in its broader campaign.

Our support for the President's veto is rooted in our belief that the bill does not advance the cause of real peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis. Specifically, the bill fails to express support for Israel's right to exist as a democratic home for the Jewish people and for a two-state resolution to the conflict.

Additionally, the bill makes reference only to aspects of the conflict for which Israel may bear responsibility and makes no acknowledgement of responsibility on the part of any other party for any aspect of either the conflict or its resolution. J Street believes that both sides bear a share of the responsibility for the conflict and for taking steps to end it.

Finally, we are deeply concerned with the atmosphere on campuses around this potentially divisive issue. This bill fails to endorse Israel's legitimacy and right to exist as a Jewish, democratic home and endorses at least part of the agenda of the BDS Movement, which is overtly hostile to Israel itself. For these reasons, we believe this bill may produce an atmosphere in which Jewish or pro-Israel students may feel singled-out or marginalized.

We believe that many of these arguments are well stated in Student Body President Smelko's veto statement - particularly in his call for fairness to all sides of an issue and for the promotion of a campus atmosphere promoting open, honest debate that does not negatively impact campus harmony.

J Street urges campus activists to unite with us in a broad-based movement calling for American leadership to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-state solution. We urge the Berkeley Senate to reconsider its passage of this bill and to take the opportunity of Wednesday's vote to uphold the President's veto.