

**Martha E. Pollack
President, Cornell University**

**Michael I. Kotlikoff,
Provost, Cornell University**

November 29, 2022

Dear President Pollack and Provost Kotlikoff,

We write on behalf of the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI) to express our concern about the continuing harassment of Professor Samia Henni of Cornell's Department of Architecture. Over the last few years, she has been subjected to abuse and threats on social media as a result of her writings and other professional activities related to decolonization. Professor Henni received an apology after an inappropriate intervention (in October 2020) by Professor Andrea Simitch, former chair of the Department of Architecture, who disrespectfully interrupted the Preston Thomas Memorial lecture being delivered by Professor Ariella Azoulay at Henni's invitation. But the harassment has continued, and resulted, most recently, in the burglarizing and vandalizing of her academic office.

Under the circumstances, Henni deserves a high level of protection, but, in addition, the university ought to get to the root of the reasons for the harassment. Instead, there was no public report to the academic community, let alone a condemnation of the incident. The outcome is that Henni has been forced into isolation and rendered even more vulnerable to further attacks, as have other campus members who might share her point of view, especially women of color.

As at many campuses across the country, faculty and students who speak up, in any way, about the human rights of Palestinians, are routinely targeted in smear campaigns; they are falsely accused of anti-Semitism, personally defamed and threatened, and many face official punishment or dismissal. The list is long and unsavory. At USACBI, we hear about these cases all the time, and we are aware of how damaging these *ad hominem* attacks have been to the cause of academic freedom and to the civil culture of US campuses. We note, moreover, that the great harms to academic freedom from such attacks were specifically recognized in a March 2022 [statement](#) from the AAUP, which warns against the conflation of anti-Israel speech with anti-Semitic speech.

In these situations, university leaders are routinely pressured by members of organized off-campus groups to take the side of the accusers and against faculty and students who speak in support of Palestinian freedom. And, as a rule, rather than

taking a principled stand for academic freedom, university leaders succumb to these pressures, either by issuing statements distancing themselves from the views under attack or by refusing to defend the accused. Professor Henni's case is a clear-cut instance of this kind of willful neglect. The result is that she has been vilified, without censure, for doing her job, as a professor with expertise in the colonial legacy in the field of architecture.

In addition to ensuring that Professor Henni is fully apprised of the ongoing police investigation into the break-in, and that you guarantee her academic freedom and safety on campus, we call on Cornell University leaders to issue a public statement of condemnation regarding these verbal and physical assaults,

Sincerely,

(on behalf of USACBI)

Andrew Ross, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University

**Daniel A. Segal, Jean M. Pitzer Professor of Anthropology and Professor of History
Cornell University, College of Arts and Sciences (BA 1980)**

Cc: Greg Scholtz, AAUP Director, Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

Risa Lieberwitz, President, AAUP-Cornell

Eve De Rosa, Dean of Faculty

J. Meejin Yoon, Dean of AAP College