

Major U.S. Law Firms Unite Against Campus Antisemitism Amid Israel-Hamas Conflict



In a unified effort, more than two dozen prominent U.S. law firms have sent a compelling letter to the deans of the nation's top-ranked law schools, expressing their deep concerns about the surge in antisemitism and intimidation on university campuses, particularly in the wake of the latest conflict between Israel and Hamas. The 27 law firms, among the legal industry's most influential players, have called on 14 of the country's leading law schools to take a resolute stance against discrimination and harassment.

Law Firms' Call to Action

The essence of the letter is clear: there is no place for antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, or any other form of violence, hatred, or bigotry on academic campuses, within workplaces, or in communities. The law firm's letter highlights troubling reports of antisemitic harassment, vandalism, and rallies advocating for the elimination of Israel on college campuses.

Leadership and Signatories

Joseph Shenker, the senior chair of Sullivan & Cromwell, spearheaded this collaborative effort. The targeted law schools, often called the "T-14," are those ranked highest by U.S. News & World Report. Notably, the letter has gained the support of several of the nation's most significant and profitable law firms, including Cravath, Swaine & Moore; Latham & Watkins; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom; and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison.

Campus Responses

While the law firms' call to action has been met with a positive response from many, it has also raised questions about the specifics of the actions law schools should take. University of California, Berkeley law dean Erwin Chemerinsky, for instance, expressed a warm welcome to the law firms' statement condemning antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racism. However, he also highlighted the importance of safeguarding freedom of speech for all students while ensuring a conducive learning environment and preparing students for the legal profession's highest standards.

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Silence from Some Quarters

Palestine Legal, an organization dedicated to protecting the rights of individuals to advocate on behalf of Palestinians in the United States, did not immediately provide a response to the law firms' letter. Additionally, spokespersons from other law schools addressed in the letter have yet to comment on the matter.

Academic Institutions' Actions

In response to these concerns, Columbia Law School has taken preliminary steps to address the situation. Dean Gillian Lester's recent message to students, dated October 31, outlines the school's commitment to examining its conduct rules and maintaining restricted access to its premises for individuals not affiliated with the law school.

This significant and collective effort by U.S. law firms highlights the growing concern surrounding the rise of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination on university campuses, urging top law schools to take action against such behaviors while encouraging open dialogue and a balanced approach to freedom of speech.

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The law firms' letter comes in the wake of two major law firms, Winston & Strawn and Davis Polk & Wardwell, rescinding job offers to incoming associates who had expressed support for Palestine following the deadly attacks by Hamas in Israel.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.

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