

November 22, 2012



Dear Administrative and Academic Faculty and Students,

Life on campus during security-related events in Israel

Following a number of very difficult days across Israel and here on campus, I feel it is important to write a letter to you relating to this. Communication with each and every one of you is very important to me. While it is not possible to go into detail and explain everything, I hope you will keep this in mind as you read this letter to you.

Condolences to the families of those killed and wishes for full recovery for those injured.

First, I would like to convey condolences to the families of those killed in the violent events of the past days and send wishes for a full recovery to the injured. Likewise, I stand in solidarity with our IDF soldiers – among them many students and faculty members who were called up to serve – and stand behind the residents in the south and central Israel, who are still in danger at this time. I was not with you here during the Second Lebanon War, but I do know that those of you who were here, were vulnerable to missile fire and know all too well how those in the south have felt over the past days. It is my sincere hope that peace and quiet will now return to Israel and that we shall hear of no more casualties.

The University's main goal is to generate exceptional academic research and teaching, while building and strengthening the fabric of all population groups in Israeli society.

Since joining the University, I have spoken proudly about the University of Haifa's uniqueness and purpose: Besides generating excellent research and teaching, contributing to a mosaic of relationships and shared experiences between all groups in Israel, including of course Jews and Arabs. Such a need is not the result of any sort of political opinion but stems from an understanding that it is a basic precondition for the viability of a democratic society and most certainly for the existence of a state as unique in character as Israel. Every day, we work hard at building and strengthening this delicate fabric and are reaping remarkable achievements in this respect. Our lecture halls and laboratories bear witness to this in their outstanding teaching and research.

This goal is challenged every time security tension rises in Israel.

This delicate fabric is stretched during times of security tension, as nerves are frayed and political extremists attempt to take advantage of the situation to arouse fervor and gain publicity in the media. During the past days, the University's management, the Dean of Students, and I have consulted together to make decisions regarding the events that took place on campus and around it. I must emphasize that the primary consideration throughout was for the safety of the thousands of people present on campus. That is an enormous challenge in stressful times, and only a thin line stands between a peaceful event and one that could incense participants and lead to human harm. One wrong word or hasty decision could ignite a fierce blaze. As of now, we have managed to pass that test, forging ahead all the while with our research and teaching on campus.

We will do everything possible to prevent ignited fervor that could endanger the University's population.

In describing the events that took place on campus, I am aware that some of you may have reservations regarding the details. Indeed, that is one of the significant challenges in facing such issues, as everyone has their own interpretation of what is happening and has happened. During these days, a number of events took place on campus that were covered widely in the media. On Thursday last week, a few dozen Arab students stood for a moment of silence on the central lawn. The media reported that it was to identify with the remembrance of Ahmed Jabari, even though the students themselves denied that. It should be noted that if that were the case, I condemn any such solidarity with the enemy. We will most definitely investigate whether at that or any other event on campus there were acts that broke the law or University rules. We will not allow the campus to serve as a wrestling arena, arousing fervor and endangering public safety.

On Sunday, the Student Union organized an impressive assembly in solidarity with the IDF and the southern region. I participated in the event, with the sincere feeling that it is important that we, as an Israeli university, express solidarity with IDF soldiers and the areas in the line of fire. I took part in that assembly because I am a sixth-generation Israeli and some of my own family members were drafted over the past few days.

The Israeli flag is my flag. I was proud of the fact that extremists within the campus were expelled by a group of Jewish and Arab students, despite the enormous tension that permeated the campus. At a meeting that we held after the assembly, and after hearing the reports from our security staff, we decided that the most responsible step to take at that time was to suspend public activity on campus for a limited time, so as to ensure the safety of students and staff. Such a step must be taken with caution, but we concluded that the situation justified it.

The University's main goal is to conduct academic research and teaching, while ensuring the wellness and safety of the University's community. That goal must always be our guiding principle. I hope that the situation in Israel will return to normalcy quickly; that the IDF soldiers will return home safely; and that we too can resume our routine activities.

I believe that if we continue working together in our belief and without fear, while marginalizing extremist influences, our direction will lead the way and we will ultimately set an example as a place where academic excellence can be achieved in an enlightened atmosphere of openness and mutual respect.

I wish to personally thank Rector of the University, Prof. David Faraggi, who helped me through all the events and contributed his extensive experience and familiarity with the University. I also thank Vice President and Director General Baruch Marzan, who managed the events on campus professionally, sensitively, and soundly, along with Head of Security and Safety, Shmuel Sender, and his team, including the senior security staff who actively ensured that all of the events ended without physical harm. I also want to thank Dean of Students, Prof. Hanan Alexander, and his staff, whose untiring efforts kept the flames low on campus; and everyone who had a hand in ensuring that peace was maintained on campus; and once again, I hope that quiet will quickly return to the State of Israel and that all of our soldiers will return home in peace.

The past few days have shown us that the challenge facing us at the University of Haifa in conducting exceptional research and teaching while fostering a unique Israeli mosaic,

is not an easy one. For that we sometimes pay a heavy price on in terms of our image. Nevertheless, I hope that we will all share belief in our path and our values.

I believe that if we continue working together in our belief and without fear, while pressing extremist influences aside, our direction will lead the way and we will ultimately set an example as a place where academic excellence can be achieved in an enlightened atmosphere of openness and mutual respect.

Yours,



Amos Shapira

President, University of Haifa