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Israeli Council of Higher Education  
POB 4037  
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Jerusalem, Israel

Dear Members of the Israeli Council on Higher Education,

We write to you on behalf of more than 15,000 US and international members of the American Political Science Association, a scholarly association that represents professors and students of political science worldwide, including faculty and students in Israel. The Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms is concerned with any challenges to academic freedom experienced by political scientists acting in their professional capacity.

It is with great concern that we enquire about recent reports on the Council's sub-committee overseeing evaluation and teaching quality's proposal to effectively close the Department of Politics and Government at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Those reports, amplified by the open letter by BGU President Rivka Carmi to the higher education community, raise troubling questions about the decision of the Council's sub-committee and its commitment to academic freedom.

We understand that the Council's sub-committee overseeing evaluation and teaching quality recommended on 5 September 2012 that the Department of Politics at Ben Gurion not be allowed to open student registration for the 2013-2014 academic year. We also understand that this followed a review, commissioned by the sub-committee, by an international evaluation committee that recommended a series of changes at the department – recommendations which the university implemented and for which members of the international review committee commended the university. Moreover, we are aware that many in the academic community are concerned that the recommendation to end enrollment is tied to disagreements with the political orientations or activities of individual faculty members at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. The apparent discrepancy between the implementation

of recommendations of the review committee, and the sub-committee's severe decision to end enrollment thus raises grave concerns about the actual reasons for such a departmental closure.

Against this backdrop, we ask for further information and urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to protect academic freedom in Israeli higher education. We would not presume to know all the facts of the case. Our concern is that no action be taken which is either directly or inadvertently an assault on the ability of members of our profession to practice intellectual honesty or that would compromise the freedom of their inquiry and teaching. Academic freedom is the foundation of our scholarly endeavors and even the appearance of such an affront would have detrimental consequences for the pursuit of understanding and knowledge, and for the reputation of Israeli higher education.

Yours truly,

Yvette Alex-Assensoh  
Chair, Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms  
American Political Science Association