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May 29, 2018

President Sylvia Burwell
American University
via email to president@american.edu

Dear President Burwell:

You may be unaware of a matter of religious bigotry requiring your urgent attention, as it involves an Adjunct Lecturer affiliated with the [Middle East Studies Department](#). As caught on video at Ben-Gurion Airport within the past day, Professor Pnina Peri displayed unbridled hostility towards religious activity in a public place, in a way that calls into question her ability to demonstrate appropriate tolerance and accommodation of religious needs for Jewish students and those of all faiths.

[In the video](#), a woman — who has been [identified as Professor Peri](#) — is seen confronting two men, one of whom is a young Rabbi with the Chabad Lubavitch movement, the same movement that brought Chabad AU to your campus and community. The rabbi in the video works at Ben-Gurion Airport near Tel-Aviv, Israel, where he facilitates brief religious experiences for Jewish travelers waiting for their flights in the departure terminal.

The rabbi offers a man the opportunity to wear Tefillin, Jewish phylacteries, only to be confronted by Professor Peri, who loudly argues with them, embarrasses them and insists they leave the area.

She says "there are people here who don't want to be a part of this. Go over there." Then she says "let's laugh," and begins to produce a false, derisive laugh. When the rabbi says "you are disturbing us," she replies, "you are disturbing me! I'm not disturbing you. Go over there!" And then she resumes her high, derisive laugh, even when another woman tells her that her behavior is "Anti-Semitism," and others try to convince her to sit down and leave them alone.

And then she says, explicitly: "why are you doing this here... this is a public place, in a public place you have to go over to the side, not here near me."

The man trying to put on Tefillin was Gad Kaufman, described as a traditional Israeli embarking on a business trip. In his post of the incident, [he wrote](#): "I was asked politely by a Chabad shliach if I was interested in putting on tefillin, and I responded positively. This woman then appeared and began screeching and interfering. It is so unfortunate that Jews here are persecuted by the 'leftist bohemian types.' If I were a Muslim or Christian would this behavior be seen as legitimate?"

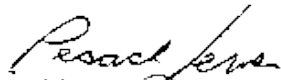
The video is clear. At no time were either of the two men doing more than speaking in low voices and performing a religious ritual. For no other reason than apparent animus for their religious practice, Prof. Peri went out of her way to create a scene that is an embarrassment to her and to the institutions with which she is affiliated. Her outrageous reaction calls the sincerity of her previous work in "multicultural theories" and "cross-culture communication" into serious question.

It goes without saying that this level of intolerance for religious expression is entirely inappropriate for a professor invested with the obligation and privilege of educating students of different races, ethnicities and faiths.

We urge you to immediately review the course load assigned to Prof. Peri for the upcoming semester, in light of her public display of intolerance. It would be unsurprising to find many religious Jews interested in taking courses in the Middle East Studies Department, and one could not anticipate that the woman portrayed on that video would necessarily treat them impartially and with complete fairness.

As this behavior occurred off-campus, we are not calling for a public statement, but we would sincerely appreciate your response to this important communication.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pesach Lerner".

Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President