

Remarks for Presidents' Summit Dinner
Matthew Bronfman
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Thank you and welcome. It is good to see so many friends here tonight.

I want to thank the many presidents, chancellors and other higher education leaders who have joined us. It means a great deal to me personally and to the organizations I represent, Hillel International and the American Jewish Committee.

Hillel and AJC are also deeply honored to have the American Council on Education co-hosting this Summit with us.

As most of you know, ACE is the largest higher ed association in America, comprising more than 1,700 colleges and universities, and you'll soon be hearing from its CEO, Ted Mitchell, who has been partnering closely with Hillel International in this important work. Your attendance tonight is critical.

And so is your vocal support for the safety and academic rights of Jewish students – ALL students – on campus. Because today, we need leadership, we need moral certainty, and we need people in charge who will stand against bigotry, discrimination, and intimidation in all of our public spaces and especially on our campuses.

These are difficult times for Jewish students on campus. You probably are aware of the statistics. One-third of Jewish students personally experienced antisemitism on campus during the last academic year. And nearly 80 percent of THOSE students said it happened to them more than once. Another 31 percent of Jewish students said they witnessed antisemitic activity on campus impacting others. And 15 percent of Jewish students said they feel they have to hide their Jewish identity on campus. Who can blame them? Swastikas and other Nazi symbols are painted on Hillel buildings or Chabad houses. Mezuzahs are pulled down from residence hall doors. Antisemitic graffiti is left in front of Jewish fraternities. Jewish students are regularly shouted down in campus political discussions and left out of campus coalitions and student groups because they belong to Hillel or attended a Birthright Israel trip.

These are not just warning signs. These indicate a fundamental danger to Jewish students, Jewish student life and to the safety and future of the entire campus. And what is happening in the virtual world is just as dangerous as the real world. Remember: our lives are increasingly conducted in virtual spaces. And this is particularly true for college students. They learn, work and socialize online. Virtual life and real life are often one and the same. Even more so after two years of isolation from the pandemic. So when we see the spread of hate online, we are seeing something that feels immediate and threatening to students where they live, where they are supposed to learn.

Too many Jewish students are attacked, bullied and doxxed when they express support for Israel or for Jewish lives in an online forum. Whether they occur in virtual spaces or in-person, these experiences are real. And they are deeply at odds with the expectations that all students should have for their college experience.

Jewish students expect celebration of diversity, yet they experience attacks on what makes them unique. They expect inclusion, yet they experience isolation. They expect equity, yet they experience bullying.

The university cannot stand for diversity, equity and inclusion selectively. The university must protect every student's safety and each student's rights to learn. The question is WHEN we will all do something about it? We know WHAT to do. And our goal in the coming sessions is to share what works: the tools that are available to use right now, the tools that protect academic institutions from hatred of all kinds. These tools are used all the time. When someone intimidates students who are Black, who are female, who are queer or trans, who were born in another country or speak English with an accent, we know it's wrong and we know what to do. We call it out, we condemn it, and we remedy it. And those tools should be applied equally when a Jewish student is called a "colonialist oppressor" or a "racist" with no basis in fact. Or when Jewish students are told they can't serve on student government because they are Zionist. Or when Jewish students are told that because they want the Jewish State to exist, they therefore stand for "ethnic cleansing" and genocide – and forced out of other campus groups. Or when speakers with a history of making antisemitic comments are given a major platform and an honorarium for campus-sponsored events – including events focused on promoting diversity and inclusion.

But the sad truth is that when such incidents occur, many Jewish students say their complaints and concerns are ignored or given no meaningful response. This is unacceptable. This is a violation of everything great universities stand for: A commitment to learning in safety. A commitment to healthy discourse and debate on critically important topics, including the Middle East. A commitment to academic freedom for all. A commitment to diversity, equity, justice and inclusion for all. These are commitments that the university community is bound to – commitments that I know every university administrator and president can – and does – support.

And so the goal of our time together is clear. We are looking to build on our shared commitments. We are looking to create a durable coalition for the commitment to academic freedom. I hope that ALL campus leaders in higher education will join us. I hope that ALL campus leaders will stand up and defend the rights of Jewish students to learn. I hope that ALL campus leaders will make it possible for students to bring their full and authentic selves to their campus community, not hiding their identity or their views. I hope that ALL campus leaders will make their campuses free from bullying, marginalization and fear. This isn't too much to ask. It's not too much to expect.

Speaking for myself and the organizations I am proud to represent, we are going to work for it. On every campus, we will be there. Because like you, we have a legacy to protect. Hillel and the

AJC were forged in a different time. When antisemitism was institutional. When Jews were blocked from certain professions, certain neighborhoods, and yes, certain universities, too. Jews are no strangers to such discrimination. And so we are especially sensitive to it – wherever it appears, whenever it appears.

The antisemitism we're feeling on campus is ugly and it's familiar. The double-standards, the demonization, the isolation, we've seen this before. So you'll forgive me if I urge you to treat antisemitism with special attention and urgency. So please stand with us. And let us build something stronger than hate. Let us build a community which sees antisemitism clearly and says: "Not here. Not on this campus. Not in this community." It's possible to do this– because it has been done before. Not long ago, university leaders in North America faced down the same hatreds and they acted with courage and conviction and a certainty that antisemitism may exist in every generation, but it must not be given a home on campus. The result was a golden age for Jewish students and we long to return to it. And I hope you will join me in making it happen now, in this time, for today's students.

Thank you.