

Statement for the Brandeis Faculty Meeting
January 16, 2014
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Following the suspension of the Brandeis institutional partnership with Al-Quds University, President Fred Lawrence pledged to keep open the channels of communication with our Palestinian colleagues. As a part of that effort, the president underwrote our prompt return to the region to explore possibilities for resuming formal relations between our universities. From January 2-6, 2014, we engaged in full-time conversations with more than 20 senior administrators and key faculty members and briefly with students.

Regarding the November 5 rally, we learned little beyond what we have described at length in our report of December 9, 2013. The Al-Quds University leadership reiterated the ways in which the rally violated university principles and policies, and they emphasized their concerted and coordinated responses to it. There are also several significant ongoing processes at AQU related to student life and conduct that have recently accelerated. We re-visited with them the steps that led to the suspension, including the strong reaction of the Brandeis community to the English translation of Dr. Nusseibeh's November 17 letter to his students. As we described in detail in our earlier report, the circumstances of that letter – including Dr. Nusseibeh's intent to address a broad range of events (not just the November 5 rally) and the idiosyncrasies of the translation – led to significant misunderstandings.

Our Al-Quds colleagues told us the partnership suspension very much surprised and hurt them. It struck them as wholly at odds with a history of trust, good will, and open conversation between our institutions; they recalled the firmness with which both universities had affirmed the partnership during times of external pressure in the past. They were particularly distressed that Brandeis would lend its name to what they saw as an effort to delegitimize Al-Quds University through accusations that it promotes or condones fascism and hatred. They pointed to their institution's long record of collaboration with Israeli and international institutions and to Sari Nusseibeh's record as a courageous advocate of peace and dialogue.

The Al-Quds leaders were unanimous in their view that the most harmful result of Brandeis University's actions was the damage to the reputation and dignity of their president wrought by the cumulative effect of the suspension of the partnership, of the language about Dr. Nusseibeh's statement used on the BrandeisNow website and repeated by the international press, and of the suspension of Dr. Nusseibeh from the advisory board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life. (This week, Dr. Nusseibeh formally resigned from the board of the Ethics Center.)

Despite these feelings, the Al-Quds University leadership is ready to resume the formal partnership. They welcomed us warmly, and they encouraged us to undertake discussions with Al-Quds faculty counterparts about how we might continue those projects that we had initiated before the suspension. Accordingly, we continued planning and executing three collaborative projects: a research exchange involving faculty at both universities, a women's leadership institute, and a curriculum development project with the AQU English Department. These are now individual faculty initiatives. However, several of our AQU counterparts told us that they may prefer to withdraw from these projects if the partnership remains suspended indefinitely.

As our December report emphasized, the relationship between Brandeis University and Al-Quds University has always been based both on common values and academic aspirations, and on a recognition that there will always be significant differences of context and perspective between our institutions and between their extended communities. Indeed, the value of this partnership is enhanced by these commonalities and differences. Today's Al-Quds University is fundamentally the same institution with which we have very successfully partnered for more than a decade. Like us, they believe they are evolving for the better. Our

Palestinian colleagues are offering us the opportunity to continue to prove that people and institutions in very different circumstances can work together towards learning, peace and understanding.