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## Free speech, too, for Israel's advocates

By JPOST EDITORIAL  
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The adage “time flies when you’re having fun” might explain why the two full weeks devoted to bashing Israel on college campuses around the world is known as Israeli Apartheid Week as opposed to say Israeli Apartheid Fortnight. And more people than ever are clamoring to join in the festivities.

In 2005, the first year college students organized to compare the situation in the “occupied” territories to South African Apartheid, events were restricted to the University of Toronto.

By 2006 the hatefest – which has done an historical injustice to bona fide Apartheid – had spread to Montreal and Oxford. In 2007, it grew to eight cities; in 2008, to 24 cities; in 2009, to 38 cities; last year, to more than 40 cities.

This year, IAW festivities will be “celebrated” in over 55 cities worldwide.

As the freedom of thousands of anti-Zionists to disparage the Jewish state is faithfully and vigilantly protected, as well it should be within legal limits, defenders of Israel are facing a potential, intolerable deterioration of their freedom of expression. University professors who should know better have joined forces with student groups, leftwing activists and Muslim groups to protest a California district attorney’s decision to press criminal charges against a group of Muslim students for infringing the freedom of speech of Ambassador to the US Michael Oren.

In February of last year, Oren was repeatedly interrupted by a group of Muslim students while giving a speech at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). Instead of waiting to express their dissent during an extensive Q and A session allotted for the end of the speech, these Muslim students took turns standing up and shouting epithets at Oren such as “mass murderer” and “war criminal.” As a result, the ambassador’s ability to make his points was significantly impaired.

This February, Orange County’s District Attorney Tony Rackauckas filed misdemeanor criminal charges against the students – known as the Irvine 11 – accusing them of an “organized attempt to squelch the speaker.” He also said the students “meant to stop this speech and stop anyone else from hearing his ideas, and they did so by disrupting a lawful meeting.”

In response, 100 faculty members at UCI have called on Rackauckas to drop the charges since the Muslim Student Union had already been suspended from campus for a semester as punishment. Thirty UC Jewish studies faculty members – including David Biale, Jewish history professor at UC Davis; Daniel Boyarin, Talmud professor at UC Berkeley; Deborah Hertz, history professor at UC San Diego; and David Myers, history department chairman at UCLA – pointed out that the demonstration had been “peaceful.”

Jewish Voice for Peace, which supports the boycott, divest and sanction movement against Israel, claimed that the DA was “targeting” Muslim American students and would strengthen “Islamophobia.”

NONE OF these arguments in defense of the Irvine 11 is relevant to the basic legal principle that the DA has a constitutional obligation to do everything in his power to protect his country’s freedom of speech, a rare commodity in most parts of the world, dearly fought for by America’s founding fathers.

The fact that the Muslim Student Union was suspended for a semester from campus because its members initially lied about organizing the disruption of Oren’s speech as a group is an internal UCI matter. Though Jewish studies faculty members would have us believe otherwise, it is not at all clear that the Irvine 11 should be rewarded for refraining from violence. And the claim of Islamophobia seems a concession to the tendency among too many Muslims to use self-victimization as a defense tactic.

Instead of attempting to intimidate or stifle their critics, Muslim students would do well to learn from their Jewish counterparts. During Israeli Apartheid Week this year, organizations such as StandWithUs, the David Project, Hasbara Fellowships, the Israel on Campus Coalition and Masa Israel Journey, along with AIPACtrained student activists, Hillel-Jewish Agency Israel fellows and others, are taking to the campuses of America to present a different, more accurate picture of Israel while respecting the right of those more critical of Israel to freedom of speech.

Only through the careful fostering of a free market of ideas will college students be able to formulate informed opinions on Israel. America’s founding fathers understood that the only way to maintain such an open exchange of opinions is by strictly protecting basic human rights. DA Rackauckas understands this. Too many of California’s intellectual elite, unfortunately, do not.