



Association of Israeli Public Research Universities



19 March, 2026

Michael Kotlikoff, V.M.D., Ph.D., Sc.D. (h.c.)
President and Professor of Molecular Physiology
Cornell University



Dear President Kotlikoff,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Association of Israeli Public Research Universities in Israel (VERA), but also as a colleague who recognizes how difficult principled leadership has become in the current academic climate.



I read your recent letter and the surrounding the recent call to sever ties with Technion with great attention. What stood out most was not only the clarity of your position, but the manner in which it was articulated: grounded in values, attentive to institutional responsibility, and unambiguous in its refusal to yield to pressures that risk undermining the very foundations of the university.



Universities today are navigating an increasingly complex environment, in which political expectations, public scrutiny, and internal tensions often pull in competing directions. In such moments, there is a temptation, even among experienced leaders, to respond tactically, to soften positions, or to seek short-term accommodation. It is precisely for this reason that your response is so important.



By articulating a clear, values-based stance, you have done more than address a specific situation. You have provided a model for leadership. You have reminded all of us that universities are not simply reactive institutions, but normative ones, grounded in principles such as academic freedom, intellectual integrity, and the responsibility to foster open and rigorous inquiry.



Equally important, your letter serves as an educational moment. Not only for faculty and administrators, but for students. At a time when many students are watching closely how institutions respond to pressure, your example demonstrates that leadership is not only about managing complexity, but about defining boundaries. About what a university is, and what it is not.



From where I sit, in a region where universities regularly operate under external pressures of different kinds, I can attest to how consequential such clarity is. Once the lines that define academic independence begin to blur, they are exceedingly difficult to restore. Your decision to articulate those lines clearly contributes not only to Cornell, but to the broader global academic community.

Please accept my appreciation and respect for your leadership. In a moment when many have chosen caution, your stance stands out not only for its courage, but for its clarity.

With best regards,

Prof. Daniel Chamovitz
President, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

