



March 20, 2019

Dear Leadership of Duke and UNC,

Beth El Synagogue is the oldest synagogue in Durham-Chapel Hill with over 400 member families including many students, faculty and staff at both Duke and UNC. We are writing to express concern about the upcoming Gaza Symposium March 22nd through March 24th.

Beth El members have been troubled by the recent uptick in antisemitic acts which have occurred at Duke, UNC, and around the Durham-Chapel Hill area. In addition to this, while criticism of Israel is, of course, legitimate and important in a democratic society, portraying Israel only as an oppressor and Palestinians only as victims functions to demonize Israel, and neither leads to constructive dialogue nor advances rigorous academic thought.

Based upon the current composition of invited speakers, the conference program fails to meet Duke and UNC's high academic standards because it lacks both presenters to articulate a mainstream Israeli perspective and anyone who can suggest actions that might improve relations between the two from an Israeli perspective. The program imbalance, recent antisemitic events in the Triangle, including on Duke's campus, and the scheduling of the conference on the Jewish Sabbath (which precludes participation by observant Jews) are fueling concern in the Jewish community that the conference will contribute to an atmosphere in which an exchange of perspectives is unwelcome and where Israel will be demonized.

We are concerned about the deleterious effect the conference will have on our local communities on and off campus. We urge Duke and UNC to create forums and opportunities that meet your own highest educational ideals, to take stronger steps to encourage dialogue and relationship building, to reject antisemitism and Islamophobia, and to avoid contributing to further division in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Greyber".

Daniel Greyber
Rabbi, Beth El Syagogue

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Goldstein".

Debbie Goldstein
President, Beth El Synagogue