

July 22, 2014

A Word from the President regarding Operation "Protective Edge" and the University of Haifa preparedness

Dear members of the University of Haifa community,

It is now 15 days since the State of Israel launched operation Protective Edge and the citizens of Israel are still under fire and our troops are in active duty in Gaza. I have therefore decided to write you a few words and share my thoughts. I have no doubt that every Israeli citizen wants peace restored to our area.

Allow me first of all to send my sympathies to the families of the soldiers and the civilians killed recently and my best wishes of good health to all those injured. I would also like to take this opportunity to support our IDF soldiers – including over 80 members of the University community that were called to reserve duty, faculty and students – and to wish them a safe return home. We now stand and will continue to stand at their disposal and see to it that their commitment and recruitment for the country, does not in the slightest, impede their work and their studies here at the University.

During these hard days, the strength and unity of the University community are more important than ever, and I call upon every one of you who feels in distress or who sees others of the University community – staff or students – in distress to turn to us and we will assist as best we can. I personally wrote to all the army reservists called for duty from the University community and offered them as much assistance as possible. I know that the other academic and administrative bodies of the University acted the same. I also turned to the heads of Southern institutions of higher learning with an offer to assist them in any way and for the past few days the University dormitories were a home away home for families of students from the South.

Since the beginning of operation "Protective Edge," most of the fighting has taken place in the Center and the South, and it seems as though we here at Haifa are more removed from the sounds of battle. But in a country as small as ours, this is of course inaccurate. I believe that there is hardly anyone without a relative or a close friend who lives in cities under missile fire, who serves in the army or who has been called for reserve duty.

Our security division has taken every step necessary to protect the lives of those on campus, the Interdisciplinary Clinical Center opened a local hotline to help people suffering from anxiety and a workshop to help children in distress, our Ambassadors Online students have set up an information dissemination war room where they act on the Internet and on social media to show the world the Israeli perspective in the current conflict, to which are also added representatives of our Friends Associations in various countries and the Student Union which also began a donations campaign for the reserve soldiers. If there are any among you who is interested in assisting, or who has any other idea about how to help, we would love to hear it.

I also wanted to share with you the fact that I received touching letters of encouragement and support from our friends around the world and in Israel. I am deeply touched by the fact that even in these trying days there are foreign students and faculty on campus who decided that despite the situation they are staying here to continue their studies and their work at the University, thereby expressing their support for Israel. We can only be encouraged by all this.

Despite the fact that even across Haifa we had several occasions when sirens were heard and members of the University community who live south of Haifa certainly heard quite a few sirens in their places of residence, we, as stated earlier, are far from the sounds of battle in the current round of fighting. However, I am certain that all of you remember well how several years ago, during the Second Lebanon War, we were on the frontline.

Our job is to reveal the national strength that is required in such times. Despite the fact that I know it is not simple, I am proud that we are continuing in our day-to-day work, research and teaching routine. I realize that the attention of many of you is now turned towards other directions and so I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for maintaining the routine here at the University – to management members, deans, heads of departments and divisions, but mostly to you, the academic and managerial staff, students and friends across the country and around the world. This commitment is not something that is taken for granted.

Only about a month and a half ago we discussed the University of Haifa's function with a look towards the future within the events of the Board of Governors Meeting and under the heading "The University of Haifa 2025." Of course we focused mainly on research and teaching, but all the while we kept in mind our unique role here in the North in strengthening Israeli society which derives from our location and the unique make-up of the population of our students and faculty members. In these difficult times, I am all the more certain of our strategic importance in strengthening the North, via both our academic research and in training our graduates who will be the backbone of the North in particular and of Israeli society in general. A few days ago I attended and spoke in a graduation ceremony for a course in the National Security College for an MA degree from the University of Haifa. I spoke to an audience that included army and security officials, including the Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense, about the importance and contribution of the University of Haifa to the national strength of the State of Israel.

In conclusion, I would like to assure all of you that we are constantly vigilant and alert to the possibility that for whatever reason we will also have to deal with the threat of rocket missiles. We are in constant contact with the police and with the Home Front Command and if there is a need, we will be ready for any scenario.

I truly hope that all our sons and daughters will return in peace to their homes, that quiet will be restored to the country and that we at the University could go back to concentrating on promoting our academic excellence in research and teaching.

Yours,



Amos Shapira
President



The University Tower as it is lit now in the evenings