Joint Statement from IAN, Jewish Federation of Madison, Milwaukee Jewish Federation, and Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Greater Chicago:

In the final month of their term, the Associated Students of Madison (ASM), the student government at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, attempted to pass radical divestment initiatives. The process evidenced blatant disregard for democratic principles that should guide such a governing body.

On March 29, after over six hours of debate, ASM voted to table indefinitely an egregious BDS resolution singling out and demonizing Israel. At the next ASM meeting, which fell during Passover, the body suspended its own bylaws to create a financial transparency committee to continue the work of the failed divestment initiative. Beyond this problematic process, the mere convening of the meeting -- over the protests of a number of council members -- when Jewish students could not participate due to religious observance, is alarming.

Subsequently, the Student Judiciary approved an injunction against the proposed financial transparency subcommittee. This injunction, citing religious-based due process violations, effectively nullified the proposed subcommittee.

The Chair and Vice Chair of ASM filed an unfounded retaliatory complaint to the Student Judiciary against the student leaders opposing divestment accusing them of racism.

At the April 26 ASM session, its last of the Academic year, a resolution calling for divestment from any business involved in private prisons, arms manufacture, fossil fuels, and border walls was introduced. In response to concerns from the Jewish community on campus, the resolution as introduced did not target Israel for divestment.

Several Jewish students spoke during open forum to thank the resolution’s original authors for their consideration by not targeting Israel and that they (the Jewish students) would not be opposing the resolution in its original form.

It quickly became clear during the meeting that many members of ASM were determined to demonstrate their single-minded desire to disparage Israel. Through a calculated, pre-mediated effort, members of ASM introduced amendments to the legislation that targeted and condemned Israel and isolated Jewish students and their allies.

The meeting fostered an extremely hostile environment in which members of ASM intimidated fellow representatives. In response to the only Jewish representative’s questions, the chair of ASM shouted “F*** white supremacism!”
Due to the previous behavior of ASM it was clear that the outcome was inevitable. As a result, in working with our terrific student leadership (Jewish and non-Jewish) we strategically chose to expose ASM leaders for their anti-Semitic actions. There were members of ASM who intended to vote no on this resolution, but experienced such a severe degree of intimidation that they feared they would be labeled racist if they did not vote in support of this amended resolution. Members of the opposition brought signs directly targeting the only Jewish ASM council member, and shouted at her as “the elephant in the room.” In the final ASM meeting of the semester, they vividly demonstrated their hate and bias.

Greg Steinberger, Director of the UW Hillel, remarked that “we have much to be proud of in this group of dedicated, determined and thoughtful students, who have worked around the clock to uphold our university values in both the public forum and in their private efforts. Their inspirational work has served to push the university community to further embrace nuance and complexity on even our most challenging global issues.”


If you have any questions or need assistance on a campus issue, please contact Stephanie Hausner at 212-284-6808 or via email at stephanie.hausner@jewishfederations.org.