

WELCOME REMARKS: VIP Reception Kicking Off Local  
Exhibition of *“People. Book. Land: The 3,500 Year  
Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land”*

Monday, November 27, 2017 5:00 PM  
SJSU Diaz/Compean Student Union  
President Mary A. Papazian

Thank you so much, Sarita. Welcome, everyone!

I am very proud to be part of this evening’s program.

And it is a distinct honor to welcome all of you to San Jose State University.

For many reasons, this is the perfect place to celebrate the west coast opening of an exhibit that chronicles the history of the Jewish people in the Middle East.

You are visiting the oldest public university in the western United States. The founding campus of the California State University.

We have a unique history and important legacy. Our people—we call them Spartans—long have been committed to the struggle for social justice and human rights.

I am an Armenian-American. My grandparents lived through the Armenian genocide. I heard their stories. As a consequence, I

have deep and profound respect for the Jewish people and *their* complex history.

And as the president of one of America's most diverse public universities—I uniquely am sensitive *and* attentive to the issues confronting our Jewish students.

One of my responsibilities is ensuring that we passionately protect constitutionally-protected free speech while keeping our eyes on the line dividing free speech from hate speech.

In a time of uncommon incivility and pervasive cultural divisiveness, this line is not as easy to draw or spot as some may think.

Universities confront unprecedented challenges in sorting through these issues. As do our students.

We are making strides in the right direction. And I am grateful to Hillel for its ongoing collaboration with us.

Sarita, you and Hillel have been a steadfast, committed partner. I wish to take this opportunity publicly to thank you.

I would like to say just a few words about this important exhibit.

For California natives like me, history is relative. 160 years is a rather long time. But let's be honest. That is an eye-blink compared to the *3,500 years* that bind the Jewish people to the Middle East. As an Armenian, I understand a long, complex, enduring history of thousands of years.

And that rich history of the Jewish people brings this exhibition to life. Since its unveiling in 2014 at UNESCO world headquarters in Paris, it has been to Europe. The Middle East. South Asia. South America.

U.N. headquarters in New York. The British House of Commons. The Knesset. The Ghandi Cultural Center in New Delhi. The European Commission Headquarters in Strasburg. It will be in Tokyo next month.

Thanks to my ancestral roots, this exhibit has special meaning for me. Armenians and Jews share much in common.

Our nation-states are young. Our global diasporas are large. Our ancestors confronted vile, violent evil.

And yet we are survivors. And these shared stories of sacrifice and survival must be preserved for future generations.

I am proud to say that next month I will make my first visit to Israel as part of a delegation of American academic leaders. It will be a chance to meet with representatives of the Israeli higher education, business, technology, and human rights communities with a focus on understanding Israel's rich and complex diversity, its current challenges, as well as the strong foundation it is building for a prosperous future.

And it will be a chance to taste history, through a visit to the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Armenian Quarter, as well as the moving Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Before turning things back to Sarita, I would like personally to recognize and welcome several important guests.

Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen. Welcome, Jeff.

Ravit Baer, Israel's top west coast consular official.

And the Wiesenthal Center's Associate Dean and Director of Global Social Action, Rabbi Abraham Cooper.

Rabbi Cooper is a New York native. I spent a good number of years on university campuses in New Jersey, Connecticut and the Bronx, New York.

Rabbi, we will have to find time to reminisce while you are here!

A warm Spartan welcome to you all!

Let me close by saying that as a career educator, academic leader and parent of two adult daughters, few things matter as much to me as ensuring that future generations truly comprehend history.

I was involved years ago in the Facing History and Ourselves campaign to support holocaust and genocide education in our public schools, and my husband was a commissioner for eight years on the Holocaust and Genocide Commission of New Jersey, which sought to do the same in the state of New Jersey.

That is what this exhibit celebrating “People. Book. Land: The 3,500 Year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land” is about. I am proud that you are here to celebrate its arrival on the west coast.

Thank you.