

## **Summary of Findings**

### **OVERVIEW**

In June 2017, the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations requested to rent space at the Queens Museum to commemorate the United Nations vote that led to the creation of the State of Israel, which actually occurred within the Museum because its building was at the time the temporary situs of the General Assembly of the UN. The Museum first declined but later agreed to this request, resulting in extensive media coverage. In an effort to determine how these events occurred, and avoid similar situations in the future, the Museum's Board of Trustees retained this firm to conduct an investigation.

We agreed to work on a *pro bono* basis and completed a three-month investigation that included the review of more than 6,000 Museum emails, more than 20 interviews, and additional research. Based on the results of that investigation, the Board concluded the President and Executive Director of the Museum, Laura Raicovich, and Deputy Director of the Museum, David Strauss, exercised poor judgment with regard to the Permanent Mission's rental request, knowingly misled the Board, and otherwise failed to comport themselves with the standards consistent with their positions.

In light of the results of our investigation, the Board offered both Ms. Raicovich and Mr. Strauss the opportunity to resign. The Board has accepted the resignation of Ms. Raicovich and terminated Mr. Strauss.

### **FINDINGS**

Some of the salient findings of our investigation were:

- Ms. Raicovich allowed the Museum to serve as a “fiscal sponsor” of a Kickstarter campaign for a different museum without the approval of or disclosure to the Board, and without putting into place proper controls for the solicitation or use of such funds.
- Ms. Raicovich was the co-editor of a book published in April 2017 called *Assuming Boycott*, a series of essays addressing the use of art in support of political boycotts. Many of the essays were strongly supportive of the “BDS movement” which overtly targets the State of Israel. Despite its politically divisive message, Ms. Raicovich did not disclose her involvement in the book to the Board even though (1) the book prominently identifies her as Director of the Museum, (2) the Foreword she co-wrote states that the goals discussed in the book are “complemented by programs, exhibitions and educational initiatives” at the Museum, (3) she paid one of the co-editors for his work on the book with Museum funds, (4) she placed the book for sale in the Museum's gift shop, and (5)

she volunteered to communicate the Museum's declination of the event to the Israeli ambassador even though these facts would leave the Museum vulnerable to accusations that its decision was driven by anti-Israel animus.

- Ms. Raicovich showed immediate hostility to hosting the event at the Museum even before consulting with the Board and then, together with Mr. Strauss, sought reasons why the Board should not agree to the event.
- Mr. Strauss told the Board that the Museum had a longstanding written policy prohibiting the Museum from renting space for political events, which was not true. Mr. Strauss added this prohibition to the Museum's website and standard rental contracts only after the request for the event was already under consideration by the Board. Ms. Raicovich was aware of these facts but failed to contradict or correct Mr. Strauss' misrepresentations to the Board.
- Mr. Strauss reported that the NYPD had advised that the Museum would need to be closed for a week to accommodate the security that would be required for the event. However, Mr. Strauss did not make clear that the NYPD cited this in a preliminary phone call as a worst-case possibility but added that the actual disruption could only be gauged after it conducted a formal security survey. Ms. Raicovich again failed to contradict or correct Mr. Strauss' statements to the Board.
- Mr. Strauss made false statements to representatives of the Permanent Mission regarding the Museum's concerns about hosting the event.

### **REMEDIAL ACTION BY THE BOARD**

Because the Museum had inadequate written policies and procedures, the Board was reliant on the information it received from Ms. Raicovich and Mr. Strauss in making its decision regarding the event. In retrospect, the Board should have been more skeptical of this information and realized that it had inherent authority to change or make exceptions to any policy of the Museum. Based on the findings of this investigation, we have recommended that the Board review and improve its policies and procedures in an effort to avoid similar distractions in the future, so that the Museum can focus on its mission and the community.

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