Mouna Maroun  
Vice President and Dean of Research  
at a massive demonstration in front of the Knesset  
on July 23, 2023  

My name is Mouna Maroun, Professor of Neuroscience and Vice President and Dean of Research at the University of Haifa.

I am an Arab, a Maronite Christian, and a woman. I was born and still reside in the Village of Isfiya, a village that is predominantly Druze. I am essentially a minority within a minority and cannot truly know what being in a majority feels like.

I am envious of you because you are the majority and when you protest, your protest is heard and resonates around the world.

I am not a politician, I am a scientist, a researcher, and my top priority is my personal mission of integrating Arab society into the higher education system. I strongly believe that our success stems from our integration in Israeli society while still maintaining our unique identity.

I am here because I believe that the higher education system has given me a fair chance, and will continue to give the same fair chance to many young women and men who are first generation to higher education.

For me, higher education is a place of equality, tolerance and shared living. The higher education and research system in Israel are the crown jewels!

Beyond the scientific breakthroughs and positioning the State of Israel in the forefront of science, it is a place for equal opportunities, enhancement of human and research capital, and the integration of marginalized groups and those who are first generation to higher education.
It allows for the free exchange of ideas, protection of academic freedom and democratic ideals, which are all crucial components that allow researchers to break through the frontiers of knowledge and advance many disciplines.

Democracy fosters a sense of openness of spirit and pluralism that is needed for exploration and creative thinking.

These days, academia is under an unprecedented attack despite the fact that Israeli universities are the agents of progress and innovation for the State of Israel; they are a main contributor to the development of a vibrant and strong economy; they guarantee the scientific advantage that Israel possesses, what makes it the Start-Up Nation.

Without a strong and independent Judiciary, academia will be subject to political whims, and scientific excellence will be compromised due to political considerations that will threaten the impressive accomplishments of Israeli science.

In order to allow scientific breakthroughs to meet the many technological, medical and environmental challenges facing us, we need a strong academia, a vibrant academia that does not compromise its standards of democracy and free speech.

There is no academia without democracy, and without academia, there is no one to safeguard democracy. We can no longer sweep things under the rug, we cannot give up on equality and freedom of speech. We cannot close our eyes when faced with the exclusion of women and demotion of Arab citizens or all those who are different.

From this stage I express my admiration of two women, who with nerves of steel, are facing an unprecedented attack: the Attorney General and Chief Supreme Court Justice. Many young girls in Israel are looking to them as role models.

A Democracy cannot go hand in hand with the discrimination of others, minorities and women.
A democracy cannot go hand in hand with the Nationality Bill which discriminates against the indigenous populations of Israel. We cannot speak of a partial democracy that only serves one side.

Today, this struggle is not only your struggle. It is also our struggle, a marginalized minority that is currently in real danger due to a failing democracy which can no longer provide safeguards.

Today's battle is for the future of Israeli society and all of its members.

I, Mouna Maroun, do not hold and will never seek to hold a foreign passport, unlike many of my friends.

I come to you from the University of Haifa, from the city of Haifa where one can find the human tapestry that makes up the whole of Israeli society. Not only mixed neighborhoods, but mixed kindergartens, mixed bi-lingual schools and mixed houses.

I was born here, here my and my family's roots are entrenched, and my society and I are deeply rooted among the olive and pine trees, just like you. This land is yours and ours and we were destined to live on it in peace.

This protest does not have a left and right or the religious against secular. Jews are not Arabs. This protest is the protest of all Israeli society and we are here to fight for a better future for ourselves and for future generations.