



Statement on the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Resolution to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions

The Alliance for Academic Freedom (AAF) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN), jointly representing nearly 1,000 U.S. faculty across all ranks, including many anthropologists and longtime members of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), urge the AAA's membership to unequivocally reject a "[Resolution to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions](#)" which will be put to an electronic membership vote on June 15-30, 2023.

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This membership-wide vote will be the second time that the AAA has considered whether the organization and its members should sever ties with Israeli academic institutions. Back in 2016, the AAA's full membership was also asked to endorse a similarly deeply divisive measure and [voted against a boycott](#). Seven years later, the principles at stake are unchanged and cutting off relationships with Israeli universities is more ill-advised than ever. We dispute the [reasoning](#) that has been put forward to once again justify an academic boycott of Israel and encourage AAA members to consider the following four points:

- The Resolution claims to support a "full embrace" of the AAA's "deep commitment to academic freedom and open debate" despite the fact that academic boycotts are antithetical to these values.

When the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) distributed its [policy statement](#) opposing academic boycotts in 2006, it made clear that the free exchange of ideas and research results among faculty members and their universities worldwide is fundamental to the academy's core mission of pursuing the truth. At the time, the AAUP cited the contentious debate over relations with Israel's academia as a key contemporary test of the principle. Its conclusion was unambiguous: the premier values at issue—freedom of communication and relationships among scholars, students, and academic institutions—should prevail despite differences, however intense, over politics and government policies (for AAUP's 2013 reiteration of its opposition to the academic boycott effort aimed at Israel, see [here](#)).

Hundreds of university leaders have also maintained that academic boycotts are detrimental to the core principles that define the academy, namely the unfettered communication of ideas and the freedom to conduct research without fear of retaliation (see, for example, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

- The Resolution will inevitably – and inequitably – result in the exclusion and isolation of Israeli academics.

The Resolution's claim that an academic boycott "pertains to Israeli academic institutions only and not to individual scholars" is untenable and has proven inadequate in preventing discrimination against Israeli academics. Indeed, the boycott of Israel's universities cannot be meaningfully separated from the faculty and students who work, teach, and study in them. The boycott thus functions as a blacklist that punishes individual academics on the basis of their nationality, political views, and the policies and actions of their employers and government.

The distinction between institutions and individuals, however attractive in theory, collapses when put into

practice. Matters have only become worse since 2016, when the AAA first considered an academic boycott against Israel. In the intervening years, Israeli academics have been [disinvited](#) from university conferences and [thrown off](#) the editorial boards of scholarly journals and Israeli students have been denied graduate and postdoctoral admission opportunities. Students and scholars in the U.S. have also been negatively affected. U.S.-based academics have seen their Israel-themed events disrupted and students have been [refused](#) letters of recommendation for study abroad programs at Israeli universities. The Resolution guarantees this now-familiar chaos of personally crafted boycotts, [resolving](#) that “individual anthropologists who are members of the AAA are free to determine whether and how they will apply the boycott in their own professional practice.”

- The Resolution paints a picture of a monolithic Israeli academy malevolently hostile to Palestinians when the reality is that there is a wide range of opinions and many Israeli academics object to the Israeli government’s policies and actions.

While the Resolution asserts that Israeli academic institutions are “complicit” in the oppression of Palestinians, the reality is that Israeli university leaders and faculty work hard to foster Arab-Jewish coexistence and ensure a diversity of opinion on their campuses, including support for Palestinian voices (for recent examples, see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Moreover, Israel’s academics have long been among the most vocal critics of the Israeli state and its society. An academic boycott would undercut the important work for peace and social justice being undertaken by many Israeli academics, as well as constructive and potentially transformative efforts to bring Israeli and Palestinian scholars together on joint projects.

As in the U.S. and many other countries, Israel’s academic institutions commendably rarely take formal political stands nor do they routinely weigh in on government policy. Recently, however, when the heads of Israel’s research universities perceived a threat to the democratic character of the state they did not hesitate to act, [collectively deciding](#) to shutter their schools in protest. Last month’s [announcement](#) of this general strike underscores just how wrong the supporters of the AAA boycott Resolution are when it comes to Israel’s academia. Indeed, punishing Israeli universities now of all times is nonsensical when the schools have shown themselves to be fierce champions of democracy and democratic principles.

- The Resolution denies legitimacy to and respect for the valid and widely shared perspectives of most Israelis and turns the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a caricature. It singles out one side for blame and establishes a false binary of oppressor vs. oppressed.

In both the academy and public discourse, Israel and its actions are subjects of considerable debate. Many scholars and practitioners who are highly critical of Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians, including members of our own organizations, will take issue with assertions that the Resolution treats as uncontested truths. For example, the Resolution’s claims that the Israeli state “operates an apartheid regime from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea” and that it institutionalizes “systematic racial oppression and discrimination” and has “enshrined the principle of Jewish supremacy” are not consensus positions in the fields of Jewish and Israel Studies. Moreover, even if not intended to do so, such depictions of Israel are likely to be perceived as deeply offensive and alienating to many Jewish members of the AAA, including nonwhite Jews.

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We call on the AAA membership to inform themselves about the serious issues at stake and to assess and evaluate the points we have raised above, which represent a non-exhaustive list of the flaws and shortcomings of the academic boycott Resolution that will come before all AAA members in June.

We believe that should this Resolution pass, it will be profoundly destructive to the AAA’s reputation and credibility. We hope that come June a sufficient number of AAA members will reject turning their professional association from one committed to academic freedom and open intellectual inquiry into an advocacy organization mandating absolute positions and ideological orthodoxies. Toward that end, we encourage the membership to revisit the [archived website](#) and [statement](#) by *Anthropologists Against the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions* and the persuasive past remarks of *Anthropologists for Academic Freedom*:

“The politicized execution of an academic boycott would rather prevent the advancement of archaeological, cultural, physical, and linguistic anthropology, thereby hindering the dissemination of anthropological research [and] events including conferences, symposia, workshops, book and museum exhibits, would be forbidden if co-sponsored by Israeli institutions, as would study-abroad programs in Israel.”

Much has stayed the same yet much has also changed since the AAA considered an academic boycott proposal back in 2016. The Israel-Palestinian conflict has accumulated more tragic suffering and loss of innocent life. Monstrous violence across the MENA region has resulted in even higher casualties. And some Arab nations have reached accommodations with Israel, generating a greater potential for [new academic exchanges](#) and partnerships as well as opportunities for [fostering mutual understanding](#) across religious and cultural divides. Despite these transformations, however, the Resolution’s proponents clearly believe that they now have a chance of prevailing.

It remains to be seen whether AAA members will decide to express their anger and frustration at Israel by penalizing their Israeli university colleagues. The Resolution does not explicitly exploit [widespread opposition](#) to the current Israeli government in order to encourage votes in favor of an academic boycott, but we are concerned that AAA members will be so motivated regardless. Whatever the circumstances behind the timing of the decision to resurrect the call for an academic boycott against Israel, we fear that at least some AAA members, and perhaps a majority, will be influenced by the [tumultuous](#) current political situation.

We therefore encourage a thoughtful consideration of the present moment. Cutting off relationships with Israeli universities now, and collectively punishing Israeli academics and those who work with them, is exceptionally irresponsible, foolhardy, and detrimental.

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ENDORSEMENTS

This statement has been endorsed by the following organizations:

Academic Council for Israel
ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal
Association for Israel Studies (AIS)
Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi)
Alums for Campus Fairness
AMCHA Initiative
Ameinu
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists (AAJLJ)
American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)
American Friends of Tel Aviv University
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
American Russian-Speaking Jews Alliance (ARSJA)
American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE)
Americans for Ben Gurion University
Americans for Peace Now (APN)
Anthropologists for Academic Freedom
Anti-Defamation League (ADL)
ARZA—Association of Reform Zionists of America
Atlanta Israel Coalition (AIC)
B’nai B’rith International
Boston Israel Action Committee (BIAC)
California Association of Scholars (CAS)
Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA)

Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation (CAEF)
The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA)
Club Z
Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM)
Democratic Majority for Israel (DMFI)
Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
European Association of Israel Studies (EAIS)
European Sociological Association's Research Network—Ethnic Relations, Racism and Antisemitism
Habonim Dror North America (HDNA)
Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (ISCA)
Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP)
Iranian American Jewish Federation (IAJF)
Iranian Jewish Women's Organization (IJWO)
Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC)
Israeli-American Civic Action Network (ICAN)
Israeli-American Civic Education Institute
Israeli-American Council (IAC)
Israeli Anthropological Association (IAA)
Ithaca Area United Jewish Community (IAUJC)
J Street
Jewish American Affairs Committee of Indiana (JAACI)
Jewish Awareness Movement (JAM)
Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA)
Jewish Labor Committee (JLC)
Jewish Student Coalition of New York (JSCNY)
Jewish Studies Zionist Network
Jewish United Fund (JUF)/Jewish Federation of Chicago
Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV)
Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA)
Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism (JCA)
Legal Insurrection Foundation (LIF)
London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (LCSCA)
Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law
Mercaz USA—The Zionist Organization of the Conservative Movement
Michigan Jewish Action Council
Middle East Forum (MEF)
MLA Members for Scholars' Rights (MLAMFSR)
National Association of Scholars (NAS)
National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)
Network of Engaged Canadian Academics (NECA)
New York Jewish Agenda
New Zionist Congress
North Carolina Coalition for Israel (NCCI)
Partners for Progressive Israel (PPI)
Psychologists Against Antisemitism
Rabbinical Alliance of America (RAA)
The Rabbinical Assembly (RA)
Rhode Island Coalition for Israel (RICI)
Russian Jewish Community Foundation (RJCF)
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME)
Simon Wiesenthal Center
StandWithUs
StopAntisemitism
Students Supporting Israel Movement (SSI)

Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)
A Wider Bridge
World Jewish Congress North America
Zionist Organization of America (ZOA)

ADDITIONAL ENDORSEMENTS WILL BE ADDED AS THEY ARRIVE.

[The Alliance for Academic Freedom](#) is a national organization of scholars and academics who believe in empathy for the suffering and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, and respect for their national narratives. Its members insist on the importance of academic freedom and open intellectual exchange, and so reject calls for academic boycotts and blacklists, as well as efforts to punish academics for their political speech, including those who support the academic boycotts that we oppose.

[The Academic Engagement Network](#) is a national organization that mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel.