



**Statement by the Academic Engagement Network on The  
Defeat of Academic Boycott in the Modern Language Association**

January 9, 2017

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) congratulates MLA Members for Scholars' Rights, a group of literature scholars in the Modern Language Association (MLA) that organized a resounding, successful opposition to a BDS resolution for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions at the Association's annual conference this past weekend. The group also successfully put forward its own resolution which, if ratified by the MLA membership this spring, will bar MLA participation in boycotts in the future.

MLA Members for Scholars' Rights forthrightly opposed the boycott resolution, arguing that academic and cultural boycott of Israel "contradicts the MLA's purpose to promote teaching and research on language and literature." The group reasserted the importance in the humanities as in other academic disciplines of principles of academic freedom and open scholarly exchange, while emphasizing dialogue and opposing blacklisting Israeli scholars in response to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The BDS resolution went down to defeat 113 to 79 in the MLA delegate assembly. The anti-boycott resolution was adopted narrowly, 101 to 93, but is hoped to bring several years of acrimonious conflict over the academic boycott to a close in the MLA. Such resolutions have roiled several academic associations in recent years, winning success in smaller, marginal, organizations but increasingly encountering stiffer opposition in larger, more established ones. The MLA victory follows a similar victory in the American Historical Association last year and, more recently, the narrow defeat of boycott by membership referendum in the American Anthropological Association.

Our organization, AEN, firmly opposes the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement and stands for academic freedom and freedom of expression on American campuses. We have been gratified in the past by the statements of leading university associations and of hundreds of university presidents against the academic boycott, and now applaud the vote of humanities faculty in their leading professional association. We especially congratulate AEN members who were active in the MLA Members for Scholars' Rights and were engaged in planning for the conference, circulating scholarship and arguments, and participating in real time debate on the delegate assembly floor.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kenneth Waltzer".

Kenneth Waltzer  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark G. Yudof".

Mark G. Yudof  
Chair of the Board