AEN and ADL Call on American Studies Association to Uphold Academic Freedom and Inclusion of Jewish and Zionist Scholars

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) express deep concern about the programming and speakers scheduled for the American Studies Association's (ASA) 2026 Annual Meeting, to take place October 22–25 in Chicago. The conference program raises serious questions about the ASA's commitment to fostering an intellectually rigorous and inclusive professional community, particularly for Jewish and Zionist scholars.

Numerous sessions appear designed to advance a singular ideological perspective on Zionism rather than to encourage meaningful scholarly discussion. Sessions titled "Dezionizing the U.S. University," "Zionism Is Racism: Introducing the Critical Zionism Studies Syllabus," "Against Zionist and White Nationalist Attacks on the Academy," and "Resisting Zionism: Anticolonial Feminist Pedagogy and Practice" are particularly troubling. Collectively, they portray Zionism as racist, dangerous, or an ideology to be dismantled, with little apparent opportunity for competing perspectives.

For the majority of American Jews, Zionism, understood broadly as support for Jewish self-determination in the Jewish people's ancestral homeland, is an important component of Jewish identity. The ASA's repeated platforming of attacks on Zionism risks sending a message that Jewish scholars are unwelcome in the association.

We are also deeply disturbed by the ASA's decision to feature Mazin Qumsiyeh in its conference programming. Published reporting has documented Qumsiyeh's past statements praising an individual responsible for a deadly terrorist attack against Israeli civilians, as well as his appearances alongside individuals associated with U.S.-designated terrorist organizations. These reports raise serious concerns about the ASA's speaker selection processes and vetting standards, as well as its commitment to the safety and well-being of its Jewish members.

Academic freedom protects the right to criticize nations, governments, political movements, and ideologies. But it also requires an intellectual culture in which contested claims are subject to scrutiny, disagreement is welcomed, and scholars are not marginalized or maligned because of their identities or beliefs. Professional academic associations shape disciplinary norms, mentor early career scholars, and facilitate professional relationships and collaborations. When an association treats particular political claims and arguments as settled truths and those who disagree as morally suspect, it risks chilling open inquiry and fostering professional ostracism and exclusion. Jewish academics should not have to conceal their identities or suppress their views to participate fully in their disciplinary communities and advance in their fields.

We call on ASA leadership to uphold its stated commitment to critical thinking and public dialogue by reviewing its conference programming and speaker selection practices, creating

genuine opportunities for intellectual exchange across differing perspectives, and unequivocally affirming that Jewish and Zionist scholars belong within the association. An organization that champions inclusion and academic freedom must ensure that these principles extend to all of its members.

ADL and AEN remain ready and committed to working collaboratively with ASA and other professional academic associations to confront antisemitism, foster inclusive academic environments, and ensure that Jewish and Zionist scholars and students are treated with dignity and respect.