



August 4, 2020

Daina Cheyenne Harvey
Vice-President and Chair, Committee on Social Action, 2019-2020
Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)

By email: dharvey@holycross.edu

Dear Dr. Harvey,

We write as chair of the Advisory Board, Executive Director, and Deputy Executive Director, respectively, of the [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) with regard to a resolution calling for the academic boycott of Israel which is scheduled for a vote by your membership this August. We write in support of those who have asked you, in a July 14, 2020 letter, to postpone the resolution, put forward an alternative social-justice and pro-peace oriented resolution, or revise the resolution to ensure that SSSP members are fully aware of what they are being asked to endorse.

AEN is an independent national organization comprised of over 750 faculty members on more than 265 campuses across the United States. AEN seeks to counter the delegitimization of Israel on campus, works to defend academic freedom, promotes robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and responds to antisemitism on campus when it occurs. Prominent university leaders and distinguished scholars serve on AEN's Advisory Board, including Irwin Cotler, Deborah E. Lipstadt, Steven Pinker, Lawrence H. Summers, and Stephen Joel Trachtenberg. A number of our organization's members are also members of the SSSP.

The resolution that is scheduled for a vote this August is nearly identical in substance to the "Resolution on BDS" (hereafter "Resolution 1") that was submitted—and defeated—at the 2019 annual SSSP meeting. As with that resolution debated and voted down last year, we are concerned that the "Resolution on the Global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS)" (hereafter "Resolution 3") directly contradicts your professional association's mission in support of academic freedom and open inquiry.

At the time Resolution 1 was being considered last summer, we wrote to then Vice President William Cabin in a letter dated July 30, 2019, noting that the resolution ran counter to the position on academic boycotts endorsed by the *American Association of University Professors*. We also wrote that it would inequitably discriminate against, punish, and exclude individual Israeli scholars by singling out Israeli universities for boycott; that it would diminish the pursuit of knowledge and prevent intellectual exchange for SSSP members by creating a blacklist of

Israeli academic institutions; and that it would undercut the important work for peace and social justice being undertaken by many Israeli academics, including constructive and potentially transformative efforts to bring Israeli and Palestinian academics together on joint projects.

In addition to these reasons for rejecting Resolution 1, we also alerted Dr. Cabin to a number of the resolution's other troubling features. In particular, we pointed out that it was full of inaccurate and outdated information. For example, we noted that while it is laudable to advocate for the academic rights of Palestinian scholars, the resolution inaccurately cast Israel as solely responsible for constraints on academic freedom, ignoring how the Palestinian Authority and Hamas routinely silence open inquiry on Palestinian campuses. We also highlighted how the resolution's endnotes largely referenced the propaganda of virulently anti-Israel NGOs and non-scholarly websites. With these sources providing much of the "data," it was not surprising that the pro-BDS Resolution 1 failed to mention a single threat to academic freedom experienced by Palestinian scholars from Palestinian authorities or societal groups themselves.

Since this year's Resolution 3, which will be very briefly discussed on August 7 at the Society's Business Meeting and subsequently voted on during a two-week period, is substantially the same as Resolution 1, each of the concerns we expressed last summer applies with equal force today.

We are disheartened that the SSSP's Board of Directors was unresponsive to the requests made by the authors of this summer's July 14, 2020 letter—even declining to make a few requested minor edits for the sake of clarity. We also find it troubling that you would see fit to consider a highly controversial resolution in light of the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many other professional associations have postponed such contentious resolutions because shortened, online annual meetings do not offer adequate time for members to properly dialogue together and to engage in a full and careful debate. Sadly, the SSSP has not adopted a similar policy.

Your decision to proceed with Resolution 3, despite the challenges of a truncated virtual meeting and the fact that many regular members will not be participating, is all the more baffling given that the nearly identical, contentious Resolution 1 was already discussed, debated, and rejected by vote of the SSSP membership last year.

We urge you to reconsider your position to proceed with Resolution 3, and instead to adopt one of the recommendations in the July 14 letter. Please feel free to forward this letter to other SSSP officers and to any SSSP members who you think may have an interest in reading it.

Sincerely yours,



Mark. G. Yudof
Chair, Advisory Board



Miriam F. Elman
Executive Director



Michael B. Atkins
Deputy Executive Director

cc: SSSP Board of Directors and officers, by email