



## **AEN Section for Women Faculty Response to the “Gender Studies Departments in Solidarity with Palestinian Feminist Collective” Statement**

The AEN Section for Women Faculty, a group of committed feminists and scholars from across all ranks in various disciplines at U.S. universities and colleges, writes to express its deep concerns with, and opposition to, a May 17, 2021 “[solidarity statement](#)” issued by the [Palestinian Feminist Collective](#) (PFC). As of this writing, the statement has been signed by 112 Gender Studies departments, programs, and centers on university and college campuses across the United States.

Our opposition to the PFC “[Gender Studies Departments in Solidarity with Palestinian Feminist Collective](#)” statement should not be misconstrued as a lack of empathy for the plight of the Palestinians or as a defense of Israel’s current government. Both Palestinians and Israelis deserve freedom, safety, and self-determination.

Open to Gender Studies department endorsements, rather than fielded as an invitation to individual faculty, the PFC statement raises worrisome issues surrounding academic freedom, particularly with regard to the free expression of junior and unprotected faculty members. As academics committed to the right of faculty to weigh in on matters of public interest openly and without fear of reprisal, we support any individual scholar who wants to sign on to the PFC statement. For this same reason, however, we are opposed to institutional signatures.

It has come to our attention that a number of faculty members who work in the Gender Studies departments, programs and centers that are currently listed on the PFC statement do not support it and, indeed, were not made aware of it prior to their departments joining. By highlighting the program homepages, the PFC disingenuously insinuates a blanket endorsement of its statement by all faculty affiliated with the 112 listed U.S.-based programs. This misleading pronouncement is a tactic of academic peer pressure.

We agree with the PFC and the signatories to its May 17, 2021 [statement](#) that the censorship of Palestinian scholars, activists, and “those openly critical of the Israeli state” is intolerable. That said, we find it disturbing that they appear to have few qualms about silencing academics and others who may wish to be openly *supportive* of Israel and/or simply disagree with the PFC view that Israel is an irredeemably racist, oppressive, settler colonial, and apartheid state. We are especially concerned for probationary and non-tenure-track faculty who self-define as Zionist and pro-Israel, including those who may be critical of Israel’s occupation and supportive of a ‘two-states-for-two-peoples’ solution to the conflict. These voices are being effectively

suppressed within the departments, programs and centers that have now joined the PFC statement.

We are very concerned that the PFC statement refuses to recognize an over 100-year intractable conflict as “controversial or complex”. In consequence, its simplistic and monochromatic depiction of this history and recent events either dismisses or ignores entirely the voluminous record of scholarship with which it disagrees.

We hope though that our Gender Studies colleagues will commit to learning more deeply and broadly about [Jewish history](#), [Zionism](#), and Israel’s [vibrant and diverse democracy](#), which is home to nearly half the world’s Jews and where Arab citizens are more integrated into the state and society today than ever before (consider that the [eruption of shocking violence](#) perpetrated by Arab and Jewish radical extremists in recent days was met by numerous [coexistence rallies](#) held across the country).

With regard to the traumatic escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas, a good place to start may be with the thoughtful commentaries of two women scholars in the AEN who point to a number of triggers and antecedents (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

One of the many facts left out of the PFC statement, but that is essential for understanding the ensuing dynamics, was the [indefinite postponement of Palestinian legislative elections](#), which incentivized both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to try to burnish their bruised reputations by inciting violence on the Temple Mount, Judaism’s most holy site—a place where demonstrators [armed with rocks and incendiary devices](#) barricaded themselves inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

There is also more that is missing.

We are appalled that in a statement decrying the violence and suffering experienced by Palestinians, there was no word about Hamas. Designated by the EU and the US as a terror organization, Hamas is the Iranian-backed murderous tyranny in Gaza that months ago called for the [imposition of travel restrictions for unmarried women](#) and supports the eradication of Israel and all Jews in its [Charter](#). The PFC statement castigates Israel for its “indiscriminate bombing of Gaza” but in fact, while Israel goes to great lengths to [minimize civilian casualties](#), it was Hamas that launched non-stop barrages of over 4,000 rockets, indiscriminately firing them at Israeli urban centers, all of which constituted unjustifiable war crimes.

The PFC statement’s errors of omission and commission in this regard are unconscionable. There is no word about how Hamas terrorists have diverted millions to build an [elaborate tunnel system](#), dubbed the ‘metro,’ atop of densely crowded neighborhoods in Gaza, whose only purpose is to maim and murder Israeli civilians.

There is no mention of Hamas's craven willingness to put the innocent in harm's way by hiding its weaponry and its fighters inside, under, and next to apartment buildings, schools, hospitals, and businesses (perhaps too the PFC is unaware that during the hostilities Hamas purposely fired on convoys with humanitarian aid. Perhaps too they may not know about the countless missiles that Hamas fired into Israel that [fell short](#), killing innocent Palestinian civilians).

Our hearts go out to those in Gaza who are burying their children. Our empathy is unlimited. It extends to the countless Israelis who night after night have had to grab their children and [rush to safety](#).

In recent days, as the conflict escalated in the Middle East, we have been horrorstruck by the [attacks on Jews](#) in U.S. and European cities. In London, men called for the [rape of Jewish women and girls](#) and in New York and Los Angeles there were vicious assaults by gangs professing to be pro-Palestinian who sought out and targeted Jewish people and their synagogues. These sickening incidents highlight that when Israel's existence is delegitimized and threatened, this hatred directed against Israel can seep out and target Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

We emphatically reject the PFC statement's false notion that Zionism is incompatible with feminism, which [erases the legacy](#) of Jewish women's involvement in feminism and the lived experiences of women—both Jewish and Arab—fighting on behalf of women's and girl's rights in Israel. We are further outraged by antisemitic attempts to exclude Jews from anti-racist work and activism on account of their Zionist beliefs and identities.

We are saddened that the PFC chose to uplift the [people of Palestine](#) with inflammatory and hate-filled rhetoric which demonizes Israelis. We are now very concerned that Jewish-Zionist and Israeli students, as well as others who hold an attachment to the state of Israel, will feel unsafe in, and alienated and ostracized from, the departments that are signatory to the PFC statement.

At a time when [antisemitism is rising dramatically](#) in the United States, including [on campus](#), any statement that has the potential to negatively impact the campus climate for Jewish students must be forcefully and unequivocally condemned.

### **About the Academic Engagement Network (AEN)**

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) is an independent national organization which seeks to educate and mobilize faculty members on American college and university campuses around issues related to Israel, antisemitism, academic freedom, and campus free speech. AEN has a four-part mission: to oppose efforts to delegitimize Israel on campus; to contribute to robust campus discussions and constructive teaching and research about contemporary Israel; to support academic freedom and campus free speech; and to respond to antisemitism on campus when it occurs.