



AEN Statement on MESA Members Vote to Advance BDS

The [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) writes to express its dismay at and opposition to the [decision](#) by members of MESA (Middle East Studies Association) taken during its recent annual meeting to advance a BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) Resolution against Israel to a full membership vote in early 2022.

AEN is an educational nonprofit which organizes over 800 faculty members on more than 250 campuses across the U.S. to foster a rigorous study of Jewish identity and experience, promote academic freedom and free speech, and combat antisemitism. As an organization committed to open intellectual exchange and inquiry, we find it deeply ironic that this Resolution is being presented within the framework of MESA's "commitment to academic freedom," when BDS is, in fact, *antithetical* to this very principle and core value that defines the academy.

The endorsement of BDS will inevitably - and inequitably - discriminate against, exclude, and isolate Israeli scholars by singling out the Israeli academy for boycott. Indeed, the Resolution's assertion that BDS targets only "institutions and not individuals" is untenable. The boycott of Israel's universities cannot be meaningfully separated from the faculty and students who work, teach, and study in them. BDS is therefore more aptly described as a blacklist which punishes individual academics on the basis of their nationality, political views, and the policies and actions of their government.

We dispute the reasoning put forward to justify endorsing BDS against Israel. Proposed by 36 MESA members, the "Resolution regarding BDS" maintains a singular focus on Israel – and a deafening silence about the travesties committed by many other nations. It paints a picture of a monolithic Israeli academy malevolently hostile to Palestinians when in fact there is a wide range of opinions and many academics in Israel object to the Israeli government's policies and actions. It accuses Israel alone of causing harm to Palestinian professors and students, ignoring how the academic rights of these scholars and students are [severely restricted](#) by the intimidation, harassment, and even violence routinely perpetrated by Palestinian governing authorities as well as radical societal groups. It asserts that Israeli universities are "imbricated" in the oppression of Palestinians when the reality is that Israel's campuses are a [model of diversity and coexistence](#), with Jews, Arabs, and others studying, researching, and teaching together. In fact, in the past decade the number of Palestinian Arab students in Israel's higher education institutions has doubled.

At a transformational time in the Middle East and North Africa, when there is ever-more potential for new academic partnerships and exchanges between Israel and its neighbors, the endorsement of BDS will undercut potential opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and mutual understanding in MESA across national, religious, and cultural divides. Furthermore, should this Resolution be ratified by the full membership in the coming year, it will be profoundly damaging to the association, which will have transformed itself from an academic association ostensibly committed to open intellectual inquiry into an advocacy group mandating political and ideological orthodoxies.

We urge MESA's membership to reject this Resolution and to reaffirm its commitment to academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas.