



January 31, 2022

Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

Headquarters:

1957 E Street NW, Suite 401 | Washington, DC

Secretariat:

3542 N. Geronimo Avenue | Tucson, AZ 85705

Via email: jeff@mesana.org, secretariat@mesana.org, troutt@sas.upenn.edu

Dear Professor Eve M. Troutt Powell and Mr. Jeffrey D. Reger,

I am writing to you in your capacity as President of the Board of Directors and Executive Director, respectively, of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc. (MESA) to express the Academic Engagement Network's deep dismay and opposition to MESA's recent decision to advance a BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) resolution against Israel's academy to a full membership vote.

The [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) is a non-partisan and non-profit educational organization comprised of over 800 faculty members on more than 250 campuses across the United States. AEN seeks to counter the delegitimization of Israel on campus, helps to defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promotes robust discussion of the Jewish experience and Jewish identity in the academy, and responds to antisemitism on campus when it occurs.

Chaired by Mark G. Yudof, past President of the University of California system, 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 among others. In addition, Donna Robinson Divine, an award-winning scholar and teacher of Middle Eastern Studies and a longtime member of MESA, also serves on AEN's Advisory Board and has in recent weeks voiced her strong opposition to the resolution regarding BDS (see, for example, [here](#) and [here](#)).

AEN was the first national educational organization to release a statement on MESA's decision to advance BDS, taken during your annual conference in early December. In it, we conveyed our disappointment and the reasons for our opposition. We urged MESA's membership-at-large to reject BDS and to reaffirm your professional association's commitment to academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas:

<https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/AEN-Statement-on-MESA-Members-Vote-to-Advance-BDS-12.3.21.pdf>

Since we wrote, a number of other academic professional associations and learned societies including *Scholars for Peace in the Middle East* (SPME) and the *Alliance for Academic Freedom* (AAF) have also issued statements opposing the proposed BDS resolution. The *Association for Israel Studies* (AIS) and *The Middle East & Islamic Studies Association of Israel* (MEISAI) have also called on MESA members to reject this misguided proposal to endorse and implement an academic boycott of Israel. Like the statement released by AEN, each of these statements note that if the resolution passes it will significantly damage MESA's reputation and credibility as an academic association ostensibly committed to open intellectual inquiry.

With the referendum on the BDS resolution open for voting today and continuing through March 22, 2022, I encourage you to share with your members AEN's statement, along with those recently issued by the other organizations noted above, so that they can make an informed decision during the voting period. These statements, issued by academic organizations and professional associations representing thousands of scholars in the US, Israel and worldwide, flag important considerations for your membership which I hope you will agree should be brought to their attention.

In addition to sharing these statements, I also urge you to create an online forum for your membership where proponents and critics of the resolution can engage together on its merits and the potential negative consequences for MESA, including [possible legal liabilities](#) and financial costs. Opening an online forum for debate and discussion will allow those MESA members who have concerns and reservations to share them with colleagues. Further, given that the resolution's text does not include citations to sources or any accompanying FAQ, such a discussion forum is all the more necessary as it will enable the thirty-six MESA members who proposed the resolution to elaborate on its key claims and to provide evidentiary material for them. Lastly, opening a discussion forum to facilitate dialogue will help to ensure that the vote is fair since members would have received information, both pro and con, about it and will have had the opportunity to share their views and perspectives.

Thank you for considering these suggestions. I would welcome your reply to them, in writing, by Monday February 14, 2022. I would be pleased to receive your reply via email (miriam@academicengagement.org) or by mail addressed to Academic Engagement Network, POB 34640, Washington, DC 20043.

Sincerely,



Miriam F. Elman

Executive Director, Academic Engagement Network

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Inaugural Robert D. McClure Professor of Teaching Excellence

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