



AEN Statement on MESA Members' Vote to Ratify BDS Resolution

The [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) writes to express its deep dismay at and opposition to the [decision](#) by members of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to vote in favor of endorsing a Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) resolution against Israeli academic institutions.

AEN is an educational nonprofit which organizes over 800 faculty members on more than 250 campuses across the U.S. to counter the delegitimization of Israel on campus, promote academic freedom and free speech, combat antisemitism, and foster a rigorous study of contemporary Israel and Jewish identity and experience. 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 the boycott "will not target individual students or scholars" is untenable. The boycott of Israel's universities and colleges 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 Israeli academic institutions. 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 at Palestinian institutions of higher education. It asserts that Israeli universities are somehow implicated 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.

Finally, AEN regrets MESA's refusal to create an open forum for its members to share multiple perspectives on the resolution, to engage together on its merits and potential negative consequences, and to make an informed decision during the 50-day voting period, a suggestion we along with a number of MESA members [recommended](#) to its organizational leadership. This decision demonstrated a lack of commitment to transparency and open debate, and a disregard for the views of scholars who do not accept the one-sided narrative promoted by the resolution's authors.

At a transformational time in the Middle East and North Africa, when there is greater potential than ever before for new academic partnerships and exchanges between Israel and its neighbors, this endorsement of an academic boycott will undercut potential opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and mutual understanding in MESA across national, religious, and cultural divides. By transforming itself from an academic association ostensibly committed to open intellectual inquiry into an advocacy group mandating political and ideological orthodoxies, MESA has done profound damage to its reputation and credibility.