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Nearly 100 Academics Band Together to Fight Rising Antisemitism and BDS

Washington, DC, May 23, 2022 – On the heels of anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) endorsements from a major academic association and a prestigious student newspaper, as well as reports of record-high antisemitism, nearly 100 academics representing campuses across the country banded together to fight rising antisemitism and anti-Israel activity.

Meeting in Washington, D.C. and virtually last week, the faculty members took part in the [Academic Engagement Network’s \(AEN\) multi-day national conference](#) to arm themselves with strategies for combating hatred toward Jews and efforts to delegitimize and demonize Israel. Participants also focused on ways to preserve academic principles and promote a safe, tolerant and inclusive campus for all students.

“Gathering at this moment is particularly critical given the uptick in antisemitism and anti-Israel activity on university and college campuses and other arenas of the academy,” stated Mark Yudof, AEN Advisory Board Chair and the former president of the University of California. “Jewish and Zionist students, and increasingly faculty and staff, are facing significant challenges as they seek to hold firmly to their beliefs and values.”

In March, the Middle East Studies Association, whose members are the primary purveyors of courses on Israel and the Middle East, [approved](#) a resolution to boycott Israeli academic institutions. In April, the Harvard *Crimson*, one of the oldest and most prestigious student newspapers, [endorsed](#) BDS. The ADL recently announced that in 2021, antisemitic incidents reached their [highest level](#) since the organization began tracking antisemitism. In the wake of the Israel-Gaza conflict in May 2021, hundreds of university departments and programs across the country released highly inflammatory and one-sided statements condemning Israel and Zionism. In addition, a 2021 [poll](#) of openly Jewish college students revealed 65% felt unsafe on campus and roughly 50% felt the need to hide their Jewish identity.

“The tactics being used by those who express hate toward Jews and wish to delegitimize and demonize Israel are evolving, and we, as faculty who are on the ground, must be ready to adapt to and counteract the hostility and bias, preserve and advance the academic principles and values we so deeply believe in and foster a safer, more tolerant campus climate,” stated Miriam Elman, AEN’s executive director and a Syracuse University professor.

The conference consisted of three days of speakers, expert panels, and brainstorming sessions, including a briefing on [current and emerging trends in antisemitism and anti-Israel activism in the U.S. academy](#); historical deep-dives into issues such as [progressive support for the creation of Israel](#) and the [role of Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda](#); training on [how to challenge misinformation and stereotypes](#) through Israel education and how to use [federal legislation to address antisemitism in higher education](#); information about the [tactics STEM faculty are using to counter antisemitism and anti-Zionism](#); and a presentation about the importance of providing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) officials with education on antisemitism awareness.

Some of the many noteworthy speakers included [Canada’s Special Envoy on Combatting Antisemitism and former Canadian Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler](#) who discussed how, from the 1970s until today, antisemitism is being laundered under the struggle for human rights and against racism and offered practical solutions for combatting anti-Jewish hatred and bigotry on campuses; [University of Haifa President Ron Robin](#) who explained how to use educational exchange like the University of Haifa’s collaborations with UAE academic institutions as the best ways to counter BDS; and [Dr. Donna Robinson Divine, Morningstar Family Professor of Jewish Studies and Professor of](#)

[Government emerita at Smith College, who briefed the faculty on how language and core concepts are being perverted to vilify Israel](#) and undermine the understanding of complex historical and contemporary events in the Middle East.

“This conference was a very meaningful experience that directly impacts the work I do—both advocating for Israel on campus and writing books about Israeli and Jewish cultures,” shared Dr. Corinne E. Blackmer, Professor of English and Judaic Studies at Southern Connecticut State University.

“Some of my research has found a close connection between modern anti-Semitism and anti-Israel attitudes,” added Dr. Kent D. Harber, Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University. “The AEN conference provided vital information on the nature of this connection, why it occurs, and how it can be combatted.”

Earlier this year, AEN developed the [2022 Guide and Resource Book](#) for university administrators to use to advance Israel literacy, recognize and counter antisemitism, and ensure academic freedom and free speech on campus.

AEN is an independent, non-partisan national organization that mobilizes college faculty to reject the delegitimization of Israel on U.S. campuses. It is comprised of over 830 faculty members on more than 250 campuses across the United States that seek to defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promote robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and respond to antisemitism on campus when it occurs.