



AEN Statement Opposing the AAA Vote to Ratify a Resolution to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions

The [Academic Engagement Network](#) (AEN) writes to express its deep dismay at and opposition to the [decision](#) by members of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to vote 2016-835 in favor of a “Resolution to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions.” Only 37% of eligible members voted on this resolution, compared to the 51% who voted when a similar boycott resolution was defeated in 2016.

AEN is an educational organization which mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. As an organization deeply committed to intellectual exchange and inquiry, we find it ironic that this resolution was presented within the framework of the AAA’s “deep commitment to academic freedom and open debate” when academic boycotts are, in fact, *antithetical* to these core values that define the academy.

A boycott of Israeli academic institutions will inevitably – and inequitably – discriminate against Israeli scholars. 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. Thus, this resolution is akin to 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 a boycott of Israel’s higher education. The resolution 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 Israeli academics have often been among the most vocal critics of Israeli government policies. It asserts that Israeli universities and colleges are “complicit” in the oppression of Palestinians when the reality is that Israeli academic leaders and faculty work hard to foster Arab-Jewish coexistence and to ensure a diversity of viewpoint on their campuses, including support for Palestinian voices. In fact, in the past decade the number of Israeli Arab students in Israel’s higher education institutions has doubled. These realities were movingly described by prominent Israeli Arab academic Alean Al-Krenawi in a recent [testimonial](#) where he also warned of how an academic boycott would only “cause harm to the steady progress that has been made.”

This resolution will have no impact on Israeli government policies. Instead, it serves only to isolate Israeli academics and their counterparts around the world who believe in academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas. Many anthropologists who reject the depictions of Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians reflected in this resolution are now effectively disenfranchised from their intellectual home in the AAA. Furthermore, we are concerned that the AAA’s adoption of an academic boycott, a core tactic used by the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, will contribute to a hostile campus environment for Jewish students, faculty, and staff. Numerous studies have documented that BDS coarsens the discourse on campus and can promote prejudice and hate. Given that it so completely denies the perspectives and lived experiences of the Israeli people, implementing this resolution will undoubtedly alienate many Jewish students and researchers from the field of Anthropology.

For all of these reasons, when the resolution was first announced, over 100 academic, Jewish, and civil rights organizations endorsed a [statement](#), jointly authored by AEN and the Alliance for Academic Freedom, which denounced it and urged AAA members to vote against it.

At a time of tension and uncertainty in Israel and the Middle East, but also a time of great potential for new academic partnerships and exchanges between Israel, its neighbors, and the rest of the world, this endorsement of an academic boycott will undercut potential opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and mutual understanding 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, the AAA has done profound damage to its reputation and credibility.