



## **AEN Section for Women Faculty Statement to the National Women Studies Association (NWSA)**

**Washington, DC. December 14, 2023.** The AEN Section for Women Faculty, a group of committed feminists and scholars from across all ranks in various disciplines at U.S. universities and colleges, expresses its deep disappointment in the National Women Studies Association's failure to lend its prominent voice in support of Israeli women and girls in the wake of the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, widely recognized as the worst mass murder of Jews on a single day since the Holocaust.

We are dismayed that for over two months, as [testimonies](#) from [survivors](#), [witnesses](#), and [emergency medical workers](#) and more documented [forensic evidence](#) from the murdered victims have been [widely reported](#), the NWSA has chosen to remain silent.

It has not spoken out against the crimes of rape, murder, and other atrocities perpetrated on defenseless women and girls on October 7, 2023. Further, it did not call for the release of hostages in Gaza, including women, girls, and female infants, who were held in [dire conditions](#) by Hamas.

Major women's organizations have been [slow to denounce](#) the use of rape as a weapon of war against Israel. On December 1, 2023 UN Women finally [called](#) for investigations and prosecutions of gender-based violence during the Hamas attack. Women's rights leaders have also now spoken out to [condemn](#) the rape atrocities during the October 7 attack. Yet, the NWSA has still said nothing, refusing to show solidarity or empathy for the victims of terror and systematic sexual violence.

The October 7, 2023 massacre of civilians in southern Israel was one of the largest attacks on women in history. The brutal mistreatment of hostage children and women, including the infirm and elderly, is also a depraved and heinous crime against our common humanity.

We are sickened, appalled, and distraught by the:

- extensive sexual assault and degradation of [Shani Louk](#), a young German-Israeli woman, at the hands of her rapists, killers, and a celebratory mob on Gaza's streets;
- merciless murder of Ruth Peretz, a [disabled wheelchair-bound teenage girl](#), and her father;
- sadistic torture of young women and girls, [raped so brutally that their bones broke](#);

- traumas visited upon young girls, who saw their [mothers killed](#) before their eyes, and upon fathers, sons, brothers, and grandfathers who lost their loved ones on that black day, including [Ilan Troen](#), a member of this faculty organization;
- barbaric killing of advocates for peace and Israeli-Palestinian coexistence, including Canadian-Israeli Vivian Silver, a [lifelong feminist and social justice activist](#) who devoted her life's work to this cause;
- depravity of the attackers, who took women and children into Gaza, and who are still holding one mother, [Shiri Bibas and her sons](#)—4-year-old Ariel and 10-month-old Kfir—in captivity;
- scores of young girls who will [suffer](#) lifelong post-traumatic stress as a result of their weeks in Hamas captivity.

A mother's [recent plea](#) to bring her 19-year-old daughter home tugs at our hearts:

“Naama is only 19, but she'll always be my baby girl. A girl who truly believes in the good of all people...As a girl, she was a member of the ‘Hands of Peace’ delegation, which brings together American, Israeli, and Palestinian youths to promote global social change...What would you do if your daughter were being held hostage by violent rapists and murderers for two months? Perhaps the better question is: *What wouldn't you do?*”

We are outraged by the NWSA's abandonment of women and girls who have experienced horrible atrocities, and by its utter refusal to acknowledge the plight of Israeli women and girls in either its recent programming or its public statements.

The [two statements](#) that the NWSA released on October 11 and October 31 condemn Israel's military response to the Hamas massacre yet fail to denounce the brutality of Hamas terrorists, who were [given orders to rape](#). In them, there is concern for how the war is impacting Palestinian women and queer, trans, and non-binary people, but not a single word in support of Israeli victims or the hostages.

The NWSA's [first statement](#) unconscionably sought to rationalize and justify the Hamas massacre. The second, by [accusing](#) Israel of perpetrating genocide in Gaza, waded into Holocaust inversion. As historians have recently [noted](#), this charge is an antisemitic canard in which Jewish victims of genocide are now cast as akin to their Nazi tormentors.

At the NWSA [annual conference](#), held on October 26-29, “educational resources for meaningful solidarity” included panels, exhibits, and materials covering conflict and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Myanmar, China and “sites of struggle” in the United States involving Native Americans. The “systemic violence in Palestine” also received extensive coverage. Not a single session or panel was devoted to the use of rape as a weapon of warfare, including by Hamas.

The NWSA's deafening silence to the plight of Israeli women and girls is inexcusable and a moral stain. It is deeply alienating to many Jewish women academics, including vulnerable non-tenured and contingent faculty and graduate students, who view the NWSA as their intellectual home and are in need of its resources and networking opportunities.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the NWSA was sought to marginalize and render Jewish scholars invisible. Nearly a decade ago, the association adopted a discriminatory

academic boycott of Israel. And in May 2021, it joined hundreds of Gender Studies departments, programs, and centers on universities and colleges across the United States to endorse a [divisive and inflammatory statement](#) that, among other calumnies, declared Zionism—a core component of the faith-based identity of most Jews—as incompatible with feminism. This false claim erases the legacy of Jewish women’s involvement in feminism and the lived experiences of women, both Jewish and Arab, fighting on behalf of women’s rights and girl’s rights in Israel.

We are disgusted by the NWSA’s antisemitic attempt to exclude Jews from progressive causes and anti-racist work and activism on account of their Zionist identities and beliefs. We are deeply concerned that on account of this indefensible position, Jewish scholars and students are now thoroughly ostracized from the association, and by extension, from the discipline of Gender Studies. Jewish feminist engagement in the NWSA has been [in decline](#) for a number of years. The organization’s professional standing has truly been diminished by its antisemitism.

Our concerns and opposition to the NWSA’s positions should not be misconstrued as a lack of empathy for the plight of Palestinians, including women and girls in Gaza who have long [suffered](#) gender-based discrimination, oppression, and violence under the cruel rule of Hamas. We acknowledge the [hardships](#) that women and girls in Gaza are now facing. We are deeply concerned that hundreds of thousands of Palestinian women and girls have been displaced from their homes and mourn the lives of the innocent who have been killed in Israeli aerial bombardments. Both Palestinians and Israelis deserve freedom, protection and safety, and self-determination.

The NWSA has lost its moral compass. We call on its leadership to take immediate corrective measures by:

- unequivocally condemning the deliberate and premeditated attacks on civilians of all ages and genders, and the mass sexual violence against women and girls, by Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023;
- advocating for the 17 young female women who, as of this writing, remain in captivity in Gaza;
- undertaking necessary long term action steps, including forming a Task Force to assess and evaluate antisemitism and anti-Israel bias in the NWSA and in the field of Gender Studies more generally.

### **About the Academic Engagement Network (AEN)**

*AEN mobilizes networks or university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. It envisions a world where American higher education welcomes, respects, and supports the expression of Jewish identity and robust discourse about Israel.*

## **Signatories\***

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**Corinne E. Blackmer** | Professor and Director of Judaic Studies | Southern Connecticut State University (**Chair, AEN Section for Women Faculty, 2023-Current**)

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*\* This statement was endorsed by the Academic Engagement Network's Section for Women Faculty comprising 50+ U.S.-based scholars. The above Section members are signing publicly in support of this statement.*