



Statement on the January 2024 Emergency Motion Adopted by the Modern Language Association's Delegate Assembly

January 22, 2024 – Washington DC: As organizations that seek to foster and promote the guiding principles for higher education faculty across the academy, we write to express our grave concern over the emergency motion that the Delegate Assembly (DA) of the Modern Language Association (MLA) [endorsed](#) at its annual meeting on January 6.

Faced with two competing emergency motions—one urging universities to ensure the physical safety and free speech rights of all students and faculty versus another claiming that only certain students and faculty were at risk and merited the MLA's attention—we are dismayed and disheartened that the DA voted in favor of the latter.

The motion that the DA has now endorsed fails to preserve campuses as welcoming learning environments where academic freedom and free expression are guaranteed for all. The motion also establishes a virulently anti-Israel political orthodoxy, despite the fact that disagreements and debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have a long history in English and foreign language departments. But politics and policy were not only at stake in the choice. The identities of Jewish and Palestinian students, faculty, and staff, along with their allies, were on the table for judgment. In endorsing a divisive and exclusionary motion, the DA found one identity worthy of the MLA's action and the other lacking. Such a denigration of the beliefs and experiences of a core MLA constituency is intolerable.

We are appalled that at an open meeting during which the two emergency motions were debated Jewish and Israeli MLA members were [reportedly](#) disrespected and “hissed” into silence, including when attempting to highlight the plight of the hostages remaining in captivity in Gaza. Such conduct, which was tolerated by MLA leadership in the room, is unacceptable and a stain on the organization's reputation.

We deplore the DA's indifference to Jewish peoplehood and to the anguish that many Jewish, Israeli, and other members of the campus community suffer as their loved ones face death and violence. We deeply regret that while the DA was presented with multiple reports documenting that both Israeli and Palestinian students feel threatened, unsafe, and unable to express their positions and beliefs on their campuses, it chose to embrace one group but not the other. As the MLA's Executive Council considers what actions to take in response to the DA's emergency motion at its February meeting, we urge it to reject this biased and divisive motion unequivocally and to act decisively to support the political, cultural, ethnic, and religious perspectives and beliefs of both peoples. Both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian members of the academic community have been threatened and bullied since October 7. As an academic association the MLA should speak out against all such threats, not just some of them.

The [Alliance for Academic Freedom](#) is a national organization of scholars and academics who believe in empathy for the suffering and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, and respect for their national narratives. Its members insist on the importance of academic freedom and open intellectual exchange, and so reject calls for academic boycotts and blacklists, as well as efforts to punish academics for their political speech, including those who support the academic boycotts that we oppose.

The [Academic Engagement Network](#) is a national organization that 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.