

**Oppose Resolution on Academic Freedom of US Citizens Visiting Israel & Palestine**  
**and Resolution on Protecting the Right to Education in Palestine-Israel**

We urge the AHA's business meeting to reject the proposed Israel-related resolutions because they:

1. Mischaracterize Freedom of Movement for Academics Entering Palestinian Territories
2. Overlook Key Facts and Context
3. Are Biased and Discriminatory
4. Are Needlessly Divisive

**Mischaracterize Freedom of Movement for Academics Entering Palestinian Territories**

The proposed resolutions contend that the freedom of movement of academics is of concern to historians—a freedom that many countries, including the United States, have at times limited. But rather than defending “the rights of American historians to travel to all foreign countries in order to study, teach, pursue research or simply carry on discussions with other historians,” as the AHA’s “Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance” (2007) call for, the resolution asks the AHA and State Department to contest solely those denials committed by Israel.<sup>1</sup>

But, contrary to the resolutions’ claims, Israel does not “arbitrarily” limit “the entry of foreign nationals who seek to lecture, teach and attend conferences at Palestinian universities” or “arbitrarily” limit the Palestinians’ right to education.<sup>2</sup> In the West Bank there are legally accepted procedures and regulations on the entry of foreign citizens, which are part of the Interim Accords signed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The proposed resolutions also fail to mention that foreign academics are free to enter the West Bank after acquiring a visa or permit—a standard procedure the world over. They can receive a three-month visa to the West Bank that can be renewed for up to 27 months. Visas are refused only in the cases of exceptional security concern; more than 90% of academic applications are approved.<sup>3</sup> Israeli decisions on granting visas or allowing border entry are also subject to judicial review. Visa denials perceived to be without justification can be overturned by the Israeli Supreme Court, to which all non-admitted persons have a right of appeal. No academics traveling to Palestinian institutions are thus “arbitrarily” denied entry. Israel’s policy resembles other democratic states’. Consider: in 2012, only 142 Americans were denied entry into Israel out of some 626,000 applicants—a refusal rate of 0.023%. In comparison, in 2012, the American refusal rate for Israeli applications for "B" visas was 5.4%,<sup>4</sup> making the U.S.’s practices far more restrictive than Israel’s by this measure. Given the rather *unremarkable* nature of Israel’s policies, it makes no sense for the AHA to “demand” that the U.S. “contest Israel’s denials of entry of U.S. academics who have been invited to teach, confer, or do research at Palestinian universities.”

The resolutions also misrepresent the question of access to the Gaza Strip. They condemn Israel for “refusing to allow students from Gaza to travel in order to pursue higher education abroad, and even at West Bank universities.”<sup>5</sup> But in 2005 Israel withdrew from Gaza which, since 2007, Hamas has controlled. The State Department notes, “Access to Gaza is controlled by Hamas, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.”<sup>6</sup> In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> “Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance,” *Perspectives*, American Historical Association, March 2007. AHA website.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Grossman, “AHA Won’t Be Considering Petition,” American Historical Association, *Perspectives*, HNN, December 15, 2014, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/157882>.

<sup>3</sup> “Higher Education in the Palestinian Territories: Entry of Foreign Academics to the West Bank,” The Embassy of Israel to the United States, Israel Diplomatic Network. Education, 2014, <http://www.israelemb.org/washington/AboutIsrael/Education/Pages/Higher-Education-in-the-Territories.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> “Border Security: Entry into Israel,” Embassy of Israel to the United States, Israel Diplomatic Network, Consular Services, 2014, <http://www.israelemb.org/washington/ConsularServices/Pages/Entry-to-Israel.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> “Resolution on Protecting the Right to Education in Palestine-Israel,” HNN, 2014, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/157891>.

<sup>6</sup> “Entering and Exiting Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza,” Consulate General of the United States, Jerusalem, 2013, <http://jerusalem.usconsulate.gov/border-crossings.htm>.

This flyer is issued by the Alliance for Academic Freedom, which is devoted to promoting academic freedom and mutual understanding about the Israel-Palestine conflict in academia, and to supporting the aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. <http://thirdnarrative.org/uncategorized/alliance-for-academic-freedom/>

*Hamas* has barred Palestinian students under its control from accepting fellowships to travel to the U.S. or to engage in educational visits to Israel intended to “plant seeds of peace” (yet it is not criticized in these resolutions).<sup>7</sup> When Israel considers applications to enter Israel from Gaza, it generally favors academics. Last week it facilitated the entry of 54 students from Gaza.<sup>8</sup> Finally, academics wishing to enter and exit Gaza may seek to do so via its border with Egypt, subject to Egypt’s rules; but the resolution doesn’t target or mention Egypt. Neglecting to share these and other details violates the AHA’s “Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance,” which calls for the facts to “be established, to the extent that is possible, before a public statement is drafted—much less circulated.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Overlooks Other Key Facts and Context**

The resolutions also omit the necessary context for the security restrictions Israel places on its policy regarding the travel of foreign citizens. After the breakdown of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the rise of suicide bombers and other terrorist threats to civilians led Israel to introduce measures to protect its population. Restrictions to the movements of Israelis, Palestinians, and foreigners from Israel to the West Bank must be viewed in this light.

Context is also missing from the “Resolution on Protecting the Right to Education in Palestine-Israel.” The resolution states that on August 2, 2014 Israeli Defense Forces bombed the Islamic University in Gaza, which houses the Oral History Center.<sup>10</sup> But according to IDF intelligence, the Islamic University was targeted because of its role both in manufacturing and firing bombs.<sup>11</sup> Middle East commentator Ehud Yaari has explained that the target of this strike was an “R&D facility within the campus serving Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades [*Hamas*’s military wing] where different components of rockets were manufactured. In this facility professors, lecturers and other staff members of the science faculties were working for years on production of rockets—including those with a range to hit deep into Israel—improving the explosive payload and seeking ways to introduce guidance systems. On several occasions rockets were fired from different spots within the campus. The Oral History center was never targeted but there may have been collateral damage.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it remains unclear whether the archive was actually damaged at all or whether the oral histories recorded therein survived the attack, in digital or other form. Before the AHA condemns Israel for this attack, whose facts are in dispute, it must at least investigate the incident.

### **Biased and Discriminatory**

Singling out Israel for criticism, these resolutions are part of a much broader campaign that certain politically active factions within many scholarly professional organizations have been waging for some years. Purporting to be universalist in intent, these efforts—including these resolutions—ignore far worse infringements on academic freedom in other countries. A glance at the U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012, for example, reveals many countries with significant restrictions on academic freedom, even as the

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<sup>7</sup> Kari Huus, “*Hamas* bans Gaza students studying abroad,” *nbcnews.com*, August 17, 2011, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/44179843/ns/world\\_news-mideast\\_n\\_africa/#.VJ27KZDAQ](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/44179843/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/#.VJ27KZDAQ); See also Isabel Kershner and Majd al Waheidi, “*Hamas* Turns Back 37 Gaza War Orphans From a Bridge-Building Trip to Israel,” *NYT*, Dec. 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/world/hamas-turns-back-37-gaza-war-orphans-from-a-bridge-building-trip-to-israel.html>.

<sup>8</sup> “Information on Academic Entry to West Bank & Gaza,” Embassy of Israel to the United States, December 2014, <http://www.israelemb.org/washington/NewsAndEvents/Pages/academic-entry-west-bank-gaza.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> “Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance,” *Perspectives*, American Historical Association, March 2007. AHA website.

<sup>10</sup> “Resolution on Protecting the Right to Education in Palestine-Israel,” HNN, 2014, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/157891>.

<sup>11</sup> “Targeted Air Strike on Weapons Facility in Gaza,” The Embassy of Israel to the United States, Israel Diplomatic Network, News, 2014, <http://www.israelemb.org/washington/NewsAndEvents/Pages/targeted-strike-protective-edge.aspx>.

<sup>12</sup> Ehud Yaari to Jeffrey Herf, e-mail, November 2014.

Country Report for Israel states that in 2012, “there were no government restrictions on academic freedom.”<sup>13</sup> Freedom House, similarly, points to far more egregious violations of academic freedom in many other countries such as China and Turkey (to name but two). In China, lecturers are routinely monitored by the state and scholars are jailed for their opinions,<sup>14</sup> with the Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti recently sentenced to life in prison.<sup>15</sup> In 2011 Turkey jailed the political scientist Busra Ersanli for her political views.<sup>16</sup> Far more devastating attacks on history—such as the militant group Ansar Dine’s outright destruction of centuries-old shrines in Timbuktu, which are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites—elicited no protest from the AHA. Even considering travel restrictions alone, other countries are far more restrictive. Roughly 20 countries bar admission to holders of Israeli passports. And academics in recent years have faced politically motivated state-sanctioned disruptions of travel in such countries as China,<sup>17</sup> the United Arab Emirates,<sup>18</sup> Ukraine,<sup>19</sup> Bahrain,<sup>20</sup> and the U.K.<sup>21</sup> To focus a resolution about travel restrictions on Israel alone while excluding these other offenders is biased and discriminatory.

### Needlessly Divisive

Israel has long been a state whose politics divide thoughtful people, including the best informed historians. It is an error to imagine that the AHA can now intervene to settle complex, multi-sided, politically fraught issues. It would be a grave mistake for the AHA to pass these resolutions, especially since the evidence for them is weak and under dispute. At the least, any resolution adopted by the AHA on Israel's policies should be based on dispassionately researched evidence, weighed with the greatest care, and examined by an array of leading scholars with the relevant expertise. Certainly, they should stake no political position on this issue before drawing on the considerable wellspring of scholarship contained in its membership regarding global freedom of entry and access for faculty and students everywhere and, furthermore, without building consensus within the organization.

Accordingly, these resolutions are opposed by colleagues with widely differing views on Israel and Palestine, how peace might be achieved, and the politics of the region. What unites us is the belief that these resolutions will needlessly divide the AHA, alienate members, and distract from the institution’s mission of helping professional scholars of history. The vast majority of us did not join the AHA to undertake the kind of political campaigns of which these resolutions are a part. We join for the conferences, the journal, the professional opportunities, the intellectual collaborations. The AHA should be a place where all scholars, whatever their politics or views on the Middle East, feel welcome. Instead of divisive resolutions, the AHA should find affirmative ways to support dissenting scholars and promote dialogue among groups with different viewpoints.

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<sup>13</sup> “Israel 2012 Human Rights Report,” *United States Department of State*. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204575.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> “Surveillance, Psychiatric Detention Limit Academic Freedom,” *China Media Bulletin*, 77, Freedom House, December 14, 2012, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/china-media-bulletin-issue-no-77#3>.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Wong, China Sentences Uighur Scholar to Life, *New York Times*, September 23, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/24/world/asia/china-court-sentences-uighur-scholar-to-life-in-separatism-case.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Cat Lucas, “Turkey Focus, 2013,” *English PEN*, April 12, 2013, <http://www.englishpen.org/campaigns/turkey-focus-2013-busra-ersanli/>.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Demick, “Uighur Activist Detained While Trying to Leave China for U.S.,” *latimes.com*, February 2, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/feb/02/world/la-fg-wn-uighur-activist-held-at-chinese-airport-20130202>.

<sup>18</sup> D.D. Guttenplan, “Journal on Education in the Arab World Cancels Event,” *nytimes.com*, March 4, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/04/world/middleeast/04iht-edubriefs04.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Roman Olearchyk, “Businessmen and Academics Denied Entry to Ukraine,” *CNBC.com*, December 23, 2013, <http://www.cnb.com/id/101292272>.

<sup>20</sup> “Letters on Bahrain,” *Middle East Studies Association*, January 22, 2014, <http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/committees/academic-freedom/intervention/lettersbahrain.html>.

<sup>21</sup> “Respected Academic Denied Entry into UK,” *Impact: The University of Nottingham’s Official Student Magazine*, November 4, 2013, <http://www.impactnottingham.com/2013/11/respected-academic-denied-entry-into-uk/>.

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