

Open Letter to Members of the American Studies Association

On December 4, the American Studies Association (ASA) announced that its National Council had voted unanimously in favor of endorsing an academic boycott of Israel. The council has submitted this resolution to a vote of the association's membership, to be completed by December 15. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which opposes academic boycotts as violations of academic freedom, is disappointed by the council's vote and urges ASA members to reject this resolution.

The AAUP, as an organization, neither supports nor opposes Israeli government or Palestinian policies, although many of our members certainly have strong beliefs on one side or the other. As the principal and oldest organization of American college and university faculty defending academic freedom, we understand that we do not have the organizational capacity to monitor academic freedom at institutions in other countries, nor are we in a position to pick and choose which countries we, as an organization, might judge. However, the AAUP does stand in opposition to academic boycotts as a matter of principle. Our position was fully enunciated in the 2005 report *On Academic Boycotts*. This report established the following principles:

1. In view of the Association's long-standing commitment to the free exchange of ideas, we oppose academic boycotts.
2. On the same grounds, we recommend that other academic associations oppose academic boycotts. We urge that they seek alternative means, less inimical to the principle of academic freedom, to pursue their concerns.
3. We especially oppose selective academic boycotts that entail an ideological litmus test. We understand that such selective boycotts may be intended to preserve academic exchange with those more open to the views of boycott proponents, but we cannot endorse the use of political or religious views as a test of eligibility for participation in the academic community.
4. The Association recognizes the right of individual faculty members or groups of academics not to cooperate with other individual faculty members or academic institutions with whom or with which they disagree. We believe, however, that when such noncooperation takes the form of a systematic academic boycott, it threatens the principles of free expression and communication on which we collectively depend.
5. Consistent with our long-standing principles and practice, we consider other forms of protest, such as the adoption of resolutions of condemnation by higher

- education groups intended to publicize documented threats to or violations of academic freedom at offending institutions, to be entirely appropriate.
6. Recognizing the existence of shared concerns, higher education groups should collaborate as fully as possible with each other to advance the interests of the entire academic community in addressing academic freedom issues. Such collaboration might include joint statements to bring to the attention of the academic community and the public at large grave threats to academic freedom.
 7. The Association recognizes the right of faculty members to conduct economic strikes and to urge others to support their cause. We believe, however, that in each instance those engaged in a strike at an academic institution should seek to minimize the impact of the strike on academic freedom.
 8. We understand that threats to or infringements of academic freedom may occasionally seem so dire as to require compromising basic precepts of academic freedom, but we resist the argument that extraordinary circumstances should be the basis for limiting our fundamental commitment to the free exchange of ideas and their free expression.

In light of these principles the AAUP recognizes the right of individual scholars to act in accordance with their own personal consciences. No scholar should be required to participate in any academic activity that violates his or her own principles. In addition, faculty members have the right to organize for or against economic boycotts, divestment, or other forms of sanction. However, an organized academic boycott is a different matter. In seeking to punish alleged violations of academic freedom elsewhere, such boycotts threaten the academic freedom of American scholars to engage the broadest variety of viewpoints. We encourage ASA members to read and consider carefully the arguments developed in our 2005 report. We urge ASA and those of its members who oppose Israeli policies to find other means to register their opposition.

Access the 2005 AAUP report at <http://aaup.org/report/academic-boycotts>.

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