



April 3, 2023

To: Professor Ramona Pérez, President

American Anthropological Association

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Via email (perez@sdsu.edu)

A RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED RESOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (AAA) TO BOYCOTT ISRAELI ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Following a long, divisive struggle on the issue in 2016, on March 3, 2023, 206 members of the American Anthropological Association have again submitted a petition to the Executive Board to boycott Israeli academic institutions.

The Israeli Anthropological Association opposes the boycott of Israeli academic institutions as counterproductive, especially at a time when Israeli academic institutions are at the forefront of the struggle to maintain democracy and equal rights for all citizens against an oppressive right-wing Israeli government. Our opposition is based on the following reasons:

The resolution calls for a ban on Israeli universities specifically but does not distinguish between the actions of the Israeli state and the actions of Israeli universities in its justifications. Israeli academia is very often in an active fight against the actions of the Israeli state, as indeed it is at

the present time. A boycott can only undermine these efforts and weaken the ability of academia to speak truth to power.

Israeli academia has for years been seen by those in power as a major threat to the right-wing administration, as well as the ultra-nationalist parties which currently control the Israeli government. This is due to Israeli academia's long record of resistance to human rights violations by the Israeli government and the state's suppression of and discrimination against the Palestinian people and their rights. The right-wing "Israeli Academia Monitor" surveilles and targets wide swaths of Israeli professors for their "anti-Israeli" activities and rhetoric.

Recently, the coalition parties of the Israeli government launched an unprecedented attack on the Israeli judiciary and the democratic nature of the country by threatening to severely limit the independence of the Israeli judiciary which has often intervened to protect civil and human rights. Many anticipate that Palestinians, both citizens and non-citizens of Israel, would be amongst the first to suffer from the government's legislation. Israeli universities have been at the vanguard of the harrowing struggle to prevent this co-optation of the judiciary. Professors, students, and university administrations marched and protested, and all the universities went on a collective strike to prevent the further degradation of Israeli democracy. The fight is active and ongoing.

The proposed boycott resolution decries Israeli universities' role in developing weapons for the Israeli military and surveillance technologies used against Palestinians. Many Israeli universities, like hundreds of American universities, and other universities around the world, have Department of Defense contracts that develop weapons which are used in unjust wars. Many of those who organized the boycott resolution belong to universities that also have DoD contracts. Any call for boycott should start at home, and not attack Israeli targets already beleaguered in their defense of minorities.

Contrary to the claims of boycott resolution supporters, the public discourse at Israeli universities and in classrooms is open and free. Palestinian students and the large Jewish community that advocates for Palestinian rights and sovereignty hold organized activities and protests to articulate their positions on campus, educating a new generation on this vital issue and raising awareness among the broader population. Israeli universities also have major campaigns to enroll Palestinian students. They have much higher inclusion rates of Palestinian students than American Ivy League universities have of African American students.

While many of us are critical of the Israeli government, one cannot but note the hypocrisy of the call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. When American democracy was under threat by the Trump administration, did American universities collectively go on strike? Are American universities not deeply complicit in the activities of the American military with no end in sight? Do American universities do enough to protect the American minorities targeted by the state? While we are fully aware of our own inadequacies, we nevertheless reject the narrative of American moral superiority.

The Israeli academy has been and continues to be engaged in a desperate struggle against a repressive government that seeks to abrogate the rights of citizens who belong to the Palestinian

minority or oppose their policies. Israeli anthropologists stand out for their criticism of the status quo and defense of minorities. An international boycott of the Israeli academy would only aid and abet the government's attempts to target Israeli universities as the enemy. At this crucial point in the survival of Israeli democracy, we call upon our fellow anthropologists to reject the call for a boycott.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of the Israeli Anthropological Association