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Monday, September 8, 2014

Anthropologists Announce New Task Force on AAA Engagement with Israel/Palestine

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The Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) announces the creation of the Task Force on AAA Engagement with Israel/Palestine, part of a broad association effort to respond to members' interest in dialogue about the ongoing Israel/Palestine conflict. The Task Force is charged with helping the Executive Board consider the nature and extent to which AAA might contribute to addressing the issues that the Israel/Palestine conflict raises. It will report to the Executive Board by October 1st, 2015.

Task Force members were appointed by AAA President Monica Heller based on criteria including: significant expertise in relevant subject areas (e.g. conflict; historical memory); a representation of the main sub-fields of archeology, linguistics, biological, and cultural anthropology; understanding of the association; no two members from the same organization or university; no one with publicly identified positions on the issue.

The members of the group are Chair Don Brenneis (UC-Santa Cruz; AAA past president), Niko Besnier (University of Amsterdam), Patrick Clarkin (University of Massachusetts-Boston), Hugh Gusterson (George Washington University), John Jackson (University of Pennsylvania), Kate Spielmann (Arizona State University), and Ramona Perez (San Diego State University).

The Executive Board has asked the Task Force to: 1) enumerate the issues embedded in the conflict between Israel and Palestine that directly affect the Association. These issues may include, but are not limited to, the uses of anthropological research to support or challenge claims of territory and historicity; restrictions placed by government policy or practice on anthropologists' academic freedom; or commissioning anthropological research whose methods and/or aims may be inconsistent with the AAA statement of professional responsibilities; 2) develop principles to be used to assess whether the AAA has an interest in taking a stand on these issues; 3) provide such an assessment.

This may include providing a comprehensive and neutral overview of arguments for and against a range of specific possible stands on these issues, as well as on any broader but relevant issues that are raised in the context. The Task Force will also recommend whether or not the Association should take any action, and if so, will recommend what form it should take. To read the full Task Force charge, please visit <http://bit.ly/1t9ELse>.

“The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine is of great relevance to the AAA, and it is worth the investment of time and careful thought that the Task Force is being asked to make,” Task Force Chair Don Brenneis said today. “The Association’s engagement in the relevant issues may take several forms. We want to be sure that we have the facts straight, and a clear understanding of the impacts associated with our choices before we recommend to the Executive Board a course of action.”

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The American Anthropological Association, dedicated to advancing human understanding and addressing the world's most pressing problems since its founding in 1902, is the world's largest professional anthropology organization.

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