Further Information on Task Force Member Selection

We have received several inquiries about the Task Force on Israel/Palestine, asking us to clarify the criteria used in selecting its members. Each member is a distinguished scholar with expertise in one or more of the discipline’s major subfields (linguistic anthropology, archaeology, sociocultural anthropology and biological anthropology). As a result, together the Task Force members bring a wide range of forms of enquiry and analysis to this endeavour. They also have expertise in conflict and historical memory, issues of identity, and the use of anthropology/archeology in political efforts. Finally, almost all of the Task Force members have a record of significant service to the Association, and thus a strong sense of its mission and governance. We kept the group small in order to ensure its agility and its ability to do its work with all deliberate speed; that is, to have sufficient time to assure that all relevant perspectives are duly considered, but not dragging out its activities unnecessarily.

As specialists in many regions, almost all outside Israel/Palestine (only Prof. Jackson has conducted fieldwork in the region), and with no public commitment to any given political stance on that conflict, the TF members are fairly typical of the majority of our members. Taken together, we think this constellation of expertise and experience will best help the TF assess the potential impacts of various possible Association engagements on our 11,000 members, and link the issues specific the Israel/Palestine to a broad range of anthropological and associational concerns. In addition, there are hundreds of AAA members who identify the Middle East as their culture area specialty; it would have been extremely difficult to select members from this group with a consensus on their representation of a necessary balance of viewpoints, while also avoiding burdening individual Task Force members with the obligation to represent any potential constituencies from which they might purportedly have been selected. At the same time, we recognize the vital importance of areal expertise. We have opted therefore to request that the TF consult with a wide range of members with such expertise as it considers a wide variety of options for possible engagement on these issues – engagement as an association, and as an association of anthropologists. The TF will summarize its consultations, identifying those with whom it has consulted (unless they request to remain anonymous).

We invite our members to identify persons whom the Task Force would benefit from consulting. Please send your suggestions to Ed Liebow at eliebow@aaanet.org. The list of consultants willing to be approached will be published on the Task Force website, although all information provided to the Task Force will be kept strictly confidential.