



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **If approved by the membership, what does the resolution call upon the Association to do?**

- The AAA will endorse a boycott of Israeli academic institutions until such time as these institutions end their complicity in violating Palestinian rights as stipulated in international law.
- The AAA leadership will implement this boycott in a way that is consistent with AAA's mission.
- The AAA will support the rights of students and scholars everywhere to engage in research and public speaking about Palestine and Israel, and in support of the BDS movement.

### **A very similar resolution came before the membership several years ago. What procedures governed the introduction of this resolution?**

- The resolution met AAA bylaws (Article VII, Section 1), which specify that a petition signed by 50 Members in good standing can request that the Board conduct an all-member referendum. A majority of votes cast in the referendum will constitute a favorable vote.
- The Board reviewed this request and decided to put the resolution to a vote of the membership.

### **How did the Association respond the previous time it was asked to consider such a resolution?**

The AAA formed a Task Force on AAA Engagement in Israel/Palestine in 2014. The Task Force engaged in extensive interviews and a site visit to the region to:

- Enumerate the issues embedded in the ongoing conflict that directly concern the Association.
- Develop principles to use in assessing whether the AAA has an interest in taking a stand on the issues.
- Provide such an assessment.
- Recommend actions to the Board that the Association could take as a scholarly and professional organization.
- The Task Force made no recommendation for or against an academic boycott.

## **What was the outcome of the 2016 AAA all-member vote?**

The boycott resolution was put to a vote held April 15 through May 31, 2016. In unprecedented voter turnout, a deeply divided membership rejected the use of boycott by a narrow margin. A record-setting fifty-one percent (51%) of the membership voted; a proposed academic boycott of Israeli institutions was voted down, with 2,423 opposing and 2,384 supporting the boycott. For an overview/analysis of the vote and the events leading up to it, see former AAA President Alisse Waterston's [letter to the membership](#).

## **Have other US-based scholarly and professional societies voted on a boycott of Israeli academic institutions?**

The American Studies Association, the National Women's Studies Association, the Asian American Studies Association, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, and the Middle East Studies Association have each passed resolutions endorsing the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign in part or in full. The Modern Language Association and the American Anthropological Association voted not to endorse the BDS campaign. The American Historical Association rejected consideration of two BDS-related resolutions.

## **What is the precedent for the Association undertaking an academic boycott? What other boycotts has the Association engaged in over the course of its 120+ year history?**

AAA has a history of annual meeting locations and companies subject to AAA boycotts and statements of censure / condemnation, but academic institutions have never been subject to a AAA boycott.

### **Annual Meeting Locations:**

- Illinois (repealed) – in 1999, the AAA passed a resolution announcing that the Association would not hold scholarly meetings in the state of Illinois until such time that the University of Illinois replace its “Chief Illiniwek” mascot. In 2007, the board agreed that in recognition of the fact the University discontinued its use of the mascot, AAA would resume scheduling meetings in Illinois.
- Arizona (repealed) – in 2010, the Executive Board passed a resolution committing to avoid holding scholarly conferences in the state (but not on Indian reservations in the state) until such time as the state repealed Senate Bill 1080 or it was struck down as constitutionally invalid. By 2015 consent decree, the law was found to be unconstitutional, and the boycott was lifted.
- Georgia – also in 2010, the Executive Board passed a resolution committing to avoid holding scholarly conferences in the state until HB87 is either repealed or struck down as constitutionally invalid. Unlike the Arizona legislation, Georgia's has never been taken off the books. However, in 2019, the Board determined that all resolutions should be reviewed at least every five years to determine whether they should remain in effect. To date, this resolution remains in force.

Locations subject to Association statements of censure or condemnation in an effort to see measurable changes instituted:

- 1994 – In support of Cuba. The AAA condemned the US Cuban embargo and asked the US Congress and then-President Clinton to adopt a consistent humanitarian policy of alleviating human suffering by ending its Cuban embargo, and adopting a more human approach to resolving differences with Cuba by encouraging a freer exchange of ideas and persons, lifting all restrictions on travel between the two countries.
- 1995 – Colorado. The AAA called upon the citizens of Colorado to challenge and repeal State Constitutional Amendment #2, which sought to repeal anti-discrimination ordinances in several Colorado cities, and also called upon Colorado citizens to urge the state legislature to prohibit the passage of any such ordinances in the future.
- Peru – In June 2009, the AAA and Organizing Committee of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) issued a statement to Peruvian President Alan Garcia expressing concern about the government’s violation of indigenous peoples’ human, territorial and legal rights. The statement also condemned the use of violence against peaceful protestors, as well as the executive decrees against which they were protesting.

In February 2010, AAA members voted to adopt a resolution urging US President Obama and members of the US Congress to acknowledge and condemn the human rights violations that were committed by the de facto government in Honduras since the June 28, 2009 coup d’état; give support to progressive forces in Honduras striving to create a real democracy; work with allied countries to find a peaceful and democratic solution to the ongoing crisis in Honduras; and join other Latin American countries in withholding recognition of individuals selected in a subsequent election held November 29, 2009.

Companies subject to AAA boycott:

- Coca Cola – in February 2009, the AAA announced it supported the Colombian union SINALTRAINAL’s call for a boycott of Coca-Cola Company and its products, and AAA called on its members to do the same until Coca-Cola agrees to bargain in good faith with its workers. In 2019, based on a review of subsequent legal scholarship concerning the SINALTRAINAL v. Coca Cola court case, the Association reassessed its support for-the Colombian union SINALTRAINAL’s call for a boycott but came to no decision concerning whether to continue honoring this boycott, despite [a 2009 legal decision](#) dismissing the union’s claims, not just on jurisdictional issues, but on the merits of the union’s allegations.
- The discussion about continuing the Coca Cola boycott prompted the board to modify its approach to resolutions, making sure the wording of such resolutions includes a practicable way to determine whether the resolution should remain in effect, a sunset clause, or at least a provision for revisiting them.

## **What did the AAA Task Force on Engagement with Israel/Palestine recommend in 2016 regarding suitable AAA forms of engagement?**

In its [Final Report](#) to the Executive Board, the Task Force refrained from making a recommendation for or against an academic boycott. They did, however, recommend [eight AAA courses of action](#), all of which the Board approved:

- Issue a [statement of censure of the Israeli government](#)
- Issue [a letter to the relevant ministries of the Israeli government](#) requesting several calls to action
- Issue [a letter to relevant authorities in the US government](#) concurrent to the statement of censure and calls to ministerial action
- Participate in conversations with sister societies regarding ethical and legal issues related to Israeli-authorized excavations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the contested ways in which cultural heritage and archaeological research are implicated in these issues.
- Provide [active resource support for Palestinian and Israeli academics](#) as well as visiting scholars in the region.
- Issue a statement reiterating its socially responsible investment policy, pointing out that AAA has no investments in any company anywhere that do not comply with this policy, including Israeli companies or companies with substantial operations in Israel.
- Determine the feasibility of book donations to Palestinian university libraries; maintain an updated bibliographic resource library, and ask sections and journals to consider publishing and organizing panels that draw attention to these concerns.
- Leave it up to individual members to take responsibility for particular actions on their own behalf, such as protesting violations of academic freedom and assessing individual employer investment portfolios to make investment choices according to their conscience.

## **What has changed about Israeli government policies and practices towards Palestinian people since the last time AAA considered forms of engagement?**

As the preamble to the resolution indicates, the Israeli government has continued to inflict harm on the Palestinian people and enact policies that consistently restrict engagement of Palestinian universities with international scholars.

- The Israeli government enshrined the principle of Jewish supremacy into law in 2018.
- Credible observers such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem confirm that Israeli authorities continue to impose systematic racial oppression and discrimination on Palestinians.

## **If the resolution were to be approved in a referendum of AAA members, what steps is the Board prepared to take?**

It will be up to the AAA Executive Board to determine the specific steps. As stated in the resolution, if it were to pass, it pertains only to Israeli academic institutions, and not to individual scholars and students affiliated with these institutions. The Association remains steadfastly committed to the protection of academic freedom and the dissemination of anthropological knowledge. AAA's academic institutional boycott is limited to AAA—as an association—refraining from formal collaborations with Israeli academic institutions or their representatives.

In addition, the Executive Board will have to specify the circumstances that must be achieved to be able to lift the boycott. As stated in the resolution, if adopted by the AAA membership, it should remain in effect until Israeli academic institutions have substantially ended their complicity in violating Palestinian rights as stipulated in international law. The Executive Board will have to establish clear, measurable indicators of complicity. It will then have to monitor and evaluate: 1) these indicators of complicity; and 2) the boycott's implementation, to assure it remains an institutional boycott and does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion or national origin. The Executive Board will determine whether the boycott should remain in place.

## **What are the likely impacts of taking such steps on Israeli government policies and practices?**

Realistically, the AAA's boycott will certainly have symbolic value, and AAA members can decide for themselves whether efforts to counteract the boycott constitute evidence that it has been effective in altering Israeli government policies and practices.

## **What are the likely impacts of taking such steps on the Association?**

If history is an effective guide, we can look to AAA's experience from 2014-16 to forecast impacts on the Association.

- The issue is extremely divisive for our community. AAA's prior experience involved extremely heated exchanges among a deeply divided membership, and harmful threats, including death threats, targeting AAA staff.
- We are likely to lose members. AAA lost more than 200 members who felt it was inappropriate for AAA to entertain the prospect of an academic boycott.
- We may be significantly restricted in the choice of cities where future Annual and Section Meetings can be located, decreasing the affordability of participation for members. There are now 35 states that have adopted anti-BDS laws or executive orders. Of these, 22 states specifically ban contracts with entities who wish to contract with the state or its subdivisions, such as publicly operated convention centers, unless the entities certify that they do not advocate or subscribe to a boycott of Israel or its institutions. This would include cities such as Atlanta, San Francisco, Detroit, and Phoenix, among many others.

Some lower courts have held this requirement to be a violation of First Amendment freedom of speech rights. However, [the Supreme Court recently refused to accept an appeal from the 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals](#) that upheld Arkansas' requirement that contractors with the state must certify non-participation in a boycott of Israel. According to our attorney, the refusal of the Supreme Court to review the decision in the Arkansas case will be viewed by lower courts as an indication of the Supreme Court's sentiment on the boycott issue, namely, that states may impose this anti-boycott certification requirement on its contractors.

- We may lose sponsors, further reducing the affordability of meeting participation. We lost one corporate sponsor who had contributed \$10,000/year for three years prior to the 2013 Business Meeting to help underwrite our annual meeting.
- We may gain sponsors. We gained one generous individual donor whose \$5,000 gift started the Travel Fund to support Annual Meeting participation from the region, which has subsequently been backed by a few modest supplemental donations.
- Our fund-raising efforts may be adversely affected in other ways. We had multiple grant-making organizations reject our funding requests to support the development of the World on the Move traveling exhibition because they felt AAA was acting inappropriately for an educational and scholarly society.

### **As an individual, what can I do to have an effect on Israeli government policies and practices?**

- Conduct research that generates credible evidence about the effectiveness of approaches to conflict resolution and the protection of human rights.
- Speak out on the principles and practices of justice and human rights – in your classrooms, on your campuses, in your writings.
- Share your views in op-eds and other forms of writing that increase general public awareness.
- Share your views with your state and national political representatives.
- Organize scholarly exchanges with people holding diverse perspectives on the uses of anthropological research to effect policy change.
- Review your own investment portfolios and retirement programs to assure that these investments reflect your decision about whether to invest in Israeli organizations or other organizations associated with substantial operations in Israel.
- Stay informed on the issues confronting Palestine and separate the rejection of Israeli practices from harm to individual persons.