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Israel Action Network Urges Opposition to Recommendation by American Studies Association Leaders to Members to Adopt a Resolution Boycotting Israeli Academic Institutions and Scholars

NEW YORK – Today, in a move condemned by numerous prominent academic scholars throughout the country, including eight former presidents and multiple ASA prize winners, the National Council of the of the American Studies Association (ASA), its governing body, recommended that its membership adopt an “ill-advised” resolution supporting an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions and scholars in a vote to be completed by December 15, 2013. The Israel Action Network (IAN), a strategic initiative of The Jewish Federations of North America in partnership with the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, issued the following statement:

“The Israel Action Network (IAN) is deeply concerned by the ASA National Council’s recommendation to its membership to adopt a measure that undermines principles of academic freedom, punishes and restricts relationships with one nation’s universities and scholars and inhibits important discourse on issues of global concern.

The resolution, put forward by ASA’s Academic and Community Activism Caucus, purports to support academic freedom in which scholars are free to pursue ideas without being targeted for repression, discipline, or institutional censorship, yet urges a sweeping boycott of Israeli institutions based on extreme rhetoric and distorted generalizations. ASA leaders ‘stacked the deck’ with sessions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that had little-to-no balanced opposing view. Thus, it is the academic integrity in which ASA prides itself that will suffer.

The ASA National Council, which is comprised of two dozen people, sets the policy for an organization of only 5,000 members. IAN commends those ASA members who actively opposed the measure and have already spoken in support of academic freedom and the perspective that academic boycotts are anathema to open debate and problem solving. Over 60 ASA members – including seven of the eight former presidents and multiple ASA prize winners – publicly condemned the resolution in a letter to the leadership. They stated that while many carry diverse opinions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a clear, collective view that any academic boycott is wrong, including one against Israeli scholars and institutions. This opposition is consistent with strong statements repeatedly expressed by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), an influential body of higher education professionals committed to furthering academic freedom, who unequivocally oppose academic boycotts and urge organizations to seek alternative means, less inimical to the principle of academic freedom, to pursue their concerns.

The ASA National Council now seeks the endorsement from full ASA membership in an electronic vote to be completed by December 15. If the majority of the membership rejects this approach, the National Council will withdraw the resolution and determine next steps. IAN calls on ASA members to vote against this counterproductive resolution. It is based on tortured logic, factual inaccuracies and distortions predicated on mischaracterizations of the role of Israel’s universities, public and private, in the development and implementation of government policy. Further, endorsing this

resolution would promote a dangerous and discriminatory policy that singles out academic scholars and institutions based on their nationality, without regard to the important role these academics, and institutions that support them, play as thought leaders in evaluating and critiquing government policy. As a society, we have repeatedly rejected “blacklisting” and the exclusion of institutions, people and points of view as destructive to finding the path to peace and reconciliation. No academic association should impose policy that will restrict the right of scholars to freely research and collaborate with colleagues. Singling out Israel from among the family of nations and making one-sided attacks based on falsehoods should shame its proponents. Moreover, we urge the academic community at large to join in rejecting this destructive approach to addressing issues of concern, which violates core principles of academic discourse.

Peace for both Israelis and Palestinians depends on both parties working together towards a negotiated, two-state solution. Academics can play a very constructive role in encouraging collaboration in all fields as well as peace-making. Divisive measures such as academic boycotts only serve to undermine this very objective.”

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IAN is a strategic initiative of The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) in partnership with the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), which together represents the majority of affiliated Jews in North America through 15 national Jewish agency members, 153 Jewish Federations, 300 Network communities and 125 Jewish community relations councils. IAN, JFNA and JCPA, all seek a just two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will allow both Israelis and Palestinians to live in lasting peace, dignity and security.