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**Israel Action Network Calls American Studies Association Decision to Adopt an
Israel Boycott Resolution a Violation of Academic Freedom**

NEW YORK – Following an unusual and troubling process over the past few weeks, the American Studies Association (ASA) today announced its endorsement of a resolution by its National Council to institute an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions by the organization. The decision represents a narrow fraction of overall members, approximately less than 20 percent of ASA membership took part in the vote. Further, it follows a condemnation of the boycott by eight former presidents. Geri Palast, Managing Director of 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 troubled that members of the American Studies Association (ASA) voted to support a boycott of Israeli academic institutions that directly violates the strongly held principle of academic freedom.

The resolution, which purports to support academic freedom in which scholars are free to pursue ideas without being targeted for repression, discipline, or institutional censorship, in actuality urges a sweeping boycott of Israeli academic institutions based on tortured logic, factual inaccuracies and distortions of the role of Israel’s universities, public and private, in the implementation of government policy. IAN is disappointed to see the ASA lend its name to such a counterproductive campaign. IAN strongly urges the academic community at large to follow the lead of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), an influential body of higher education professionals committed to furthering academic freedom, that came forward to unequivocally oppose academic boycotts. In an open letter, AAUP leadership expressed their disappointment over the National Council’s decision, and urged ASA members to reject the boycott and to seek alternative means to pursue their concerns.

The process of endorsing the resolution, which consisted of an electronic membership vote that closed on December 15, raised issues regarding open member discourse and transparency. The call for a membership vote followed a recommendation by the ASA National Council, a small body of two dozen people that sets policy for an organization of only 5,000 members. The resolution faced vocal opposition by eight former ASA Presidents, ASA award winners, and members that wrote an open letter condemning the resolution with 70 signatories. Until challenged, the leadership did not provide dissenting views or access to the membership to opponents of the resolution. ASA leaders who claim to champion academic freedom withheld alternate views from their colleagues, resulting in a vote where only one side of a complex conflict was formally presented. This reflected the same imbalance seen at the ASA’s recent

annual meeting, where a panel discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict featured only panelists in favor of a boycott.

IAN commends those ASA members who actively opposed this ill-advised measure, and spoke in support of academic freedom and the perspective that academic boycotts are anathema to open debate and problem solving.

As a practical matter, this resolution will have limited symbolic significance, but it still raises a number of deeply troubling concerns. Its adoption promotes a discriminatory policy that could fuel a dangerous trend in which violating rights to academic freedom becomes a norm. It singles out academic scholars and institutions based on their nationality, without regard to the important role they play as thought leaders in evaluating and critiquing government policy. And rather than encouraging important discourse and debate, or promoting Israeli-Palestinian coexistence, this resolution will only polarize the academic world by 'blacklisting' alternative views, scholars and institutions.

Peace for both Israelis and Palestinians depends on both parties working together towards a negotiated, two-state solution. Even Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has rejected boycotts of Israel as counterproductive. Divisive measures such as academic boycotts will only serve to further deflect attention away from serious moral and political issues. These one-sided attacks based on falsehoods should embarrass their proponents, and we move our community to condemn this action."

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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, 154 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 peoples to live in lasting peace, dignity and security. However an academic boycott such as the one imposed by ASA only takes us further from that goal.