The Advocacy Committee of the AAAS Executive Board seeks comment from the membership of the Association. Per the guidelines of endorsement procedures, a proposed endorsement statement is sent to AAAS members for public comment. The Advocacy Committee does not ask for support or opposition to the proposed statement; instead, it wishes to solicit any information that members think important for the committee to consider as it considers bringing the statement to the Board for deliberation and vote. Members are given two days to provide any information they think is important and relevant for the Advocacy Committee and the Board to consider. Comments will be accepted until 10/28/2023. Please fill out this form.

The Association for Asian American Studies Endorsement of Solidarity with Palestine Statement - DRAFT

October 2023

The Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) unequivocally supports Palestinian freedom and self-determination. The intensifying violence between Israel and Hamas this month must be contextualized within decades of Israel’s Zionist settler colonial project, militarized blockades, indefinite incarcerations, internationally recognized apartheid government, massacres and slow killings, as well as forcible evictions in Occupied Palestine. Currently, one of the world’s major military powers is enacting collective punishment against Palestinian civilians while cutting off food, aid, and vital resources– all legally classified as war crimes– within an already besieged 25-mile long territory. Named “the world’s largest open air prison” by human rights organizations, Israeli-controlled Gaza holds 2 million residents, half of whom are children. The death toll is already in the thousands, and entire infrastructures of life have been wiped out. We are watching genocide unfold in real-time.

We follow Palestinian organizations’ current calls for the US government to stop funding these atrocities in the form of billions of dollars of unconditional military aid to Israel annually, to demand an immediate ceasefire, and to support urgent humanitarian aid into Gaza as well as UN protection for Palestinians in Gaza. We affirm with them that the only meaningful way to end settler colonial violence, and its reactive violence, is by addressing the root causes of oppression. As scholars of Asian diasporas wrought by colonial and imperial violence, we stand with Palestinians in their long struggle toward decolonization.

We mourn the loss of all civilian life. We refuse, however, to replicate the inequality with which only some lives are deemed grievable in mainstream depictions of Israel and Occupied Palestine. We recognize that the act of condemning terrorism and Israel’s civilian casualties has fast become a prerequisite for making any Palestinian suffering legible. As scholars of Ethnic Studies, history repeatedly shows us the underlying racism of this uneven expectation. Violence is the language imposed by colonial states, as decades of disproportionate Palestinian deaths confirm.

In 2013, AAAS became the first academic association in the US to adopt the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, a peaceful political action initiated by Palestinians to impede the financial structure of Israel’s occupation. Yet, BDS remains condemned and obstructed by US and European states as well as private institutions. The reality is that no form of Palestinian resistance is acceptable in Israel or in its allied states; any such resistance is consistently met with disproportionate violence and/or suppression. As a discipline that emerged through anticolonial and anti-imperial critique, we will forever commit to solidarity with the oppressed.

We are witnessing a tacit acquiescence to genocide as Western media reports continue to erase the historical contexts of violence for Palestinians living under Israel’s occupation. It is impossible to turn on US media coverage
without hearing dangerous misinformation as well as anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racial stereotypes, which attempt to re-narrate what is undeniably a relation between oppressor and oppressed. It is urgent for universities to make possible safe, unpoliced spaces for learning and historicization, as well as anticolonial and antiracist critique. It is imperative that universities protect the academic freedom of their faculty, students, and staff. Regulating anticolonial solidarity, pedagogy, and speech while we witness the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians is unconscionable.

Our campuses are academically and ethically responsible to teach, not erase, the experiences of those communities long dispossessed in both geopolitics and historical narratives. Anticolonial critique is not only a legitimate political and ethical position but also a long and transdisciplinary academic tradition. Furthermore, critiquing the state of Israel or advocating for Palestinian struggles are not the same as antisemitism. Equating the politics of all Jewish people with Israel’s state policies in the face of ongoing, worldwide Jewish solidarity with Palestinians distracts from actual antisemitism on the rise. We affirm that advocacy for the Palestinian struggle, within and outside of the classroom, is aligned with the fight for liberation and against all forms of discrimination and racism.

As educators, we wholeheartedly support Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, and allied student communities who are mourning and speaking for justice in Palestine while experiencing abhorrent intimidation, targeting, and censorship. As antiracist teachers, we demand that all universities protect student speech, and particularly advocate for Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim populations as well as members of organizations like Students for Justice in Palestine, who are facing racialized harassment throughout the United States. We call on our institutions to combat and repair the active racism against Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students on their campuses.

To our senior faculty colleagues: In this time of escalated censorship and intimidation of our peers, we implore you to actively support untenured junior colleagues, contingent faculty and staff, as well as students who will, once again, suffer the academy’s backlash.

AAAS renews its long commitment to centering Palestinians’ demands for an end to their occupation and the fulfillment of self-determination. As settlers within another colonial state, we may be complicit or resistant actors in the collusion of the US, Israel, and European countries as they collectively produce Palestinian oppression. Against deeply interconnected forms of colonial power, global imperial and arms networks, and state repression, we must learn from scholars and activists who are drawing transnational parallels and shared justice movements. We follow on-the-ground activists in interconnecting Palestine’s struggle with the long criminalization of Black and Indigenous protest in the US, the ongoing suppression of Kashmir’s anticolonial movements against Indian occupation, the forced expulsion of Armenians from Artsakh, the enforced mass starvation of Afghanistan under current US imperial policies, and too many more.

We will not waver in our commitment to anticolonial and decolonial justice in Palestine, and everywhere.

*We acknowledge that this statement emerged as a popular struggle within our association, and we thank the Critical SWANA Diaspora Studies Section for spearheading it with their commitment and labor.*