

RESOLUTION

I. BACKGROUND

On December 4, 2013 the American Studies Association adopted a resolution stating that the organization would “honor the call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.” This resolution has been roundly criticized by many academics, including members of the UW faculty, on the grounds that it operates to restrict the exchange of views and sharing of ideas that is essential to academic freedom. While the ASA has officially taken the position that the boycott only applies to the ASA’s institutional arrangements, they have also taken the position that U.S. scholars are “discouraged” from engaging in activities that involve “a formal partnership with or sponsorship by Israeli academic institutions”.

http://www.theasa.net/what_does_the_academic_boycott_mean_for_the_asa). In “discouraging” scholars in this way, the ASA calls on its members to relinquish the intellectual relationships, avenues of inquiry, and resources that make academic freedom a viable and living reality. In addition, the ASA resolution does not offer any explanation for the fact that Israel is singled out for a boycott despite the fact that other countries whose governments engage in far more severe violations of human rights and academic freedom are left unaddressed. While we recognize that there are valid arguments for treating Israel differently from nations that do not claim to be democracies or that do not enjoy a similarly close relationship with the United States, without adequate explanation the act of singling out Israel raises concerns about threats to academic freedom, as history and experience have shown.

We recognize the fact that the ASA boycott is not a unique case, but rather stands as an example of larger phenomenon that has recently come to public attention.

II. DISCUSSION

Academic freedom means more than the absence of intervention by political authorities. The tradition of sifting and winnowing of ideas requires the creation and preservation of an atmosphere in which different views are freely heard, students are confronted with unfamiliar and challenging arguments, and members of the university community are exposed to different voices. We recognize that the ASA is a private organization, and as such has First Amendment rights of expressive association that permit its controlling body to exclude those who would interfere with the expression of the group’s message. Nonetheless, it is singularly appropriate that the faculty of the University of Wisconsin expresses a position in the current controversy. The ASA boycott is intended to discourage activities in which many UW faculty have engaged to the benefit of their own work and that of the University. UW has a long tradition of faculty involvement in governance, which gives the Faculty Senate both the privilege and the responsibility of expressing the views of the University faculty on matters affecting our community.

The following resolution is proposed in the hope that professional organizations such as the ASA will return to their proper role of fostering the expression and exchange of views among scholars all over the world.

(continued)

III. RESOLUTION

Whereas the adoption by the Association for American Studies of a resolution instituting an academic boycott of Israel by that institution is contrary to principles of free exchange of ideas that are central to the mission of the University of Wisconsin;

Therefore, the Faculty Senate of the University of Wisconsin expresses its opposition to and rejection of the ASA boycott.

And therefore, the Faculty Senate similarly condemns any limitations to the free exchange and exploration of ideas, and any academic boycott or similar policy that threatens to distort the mission of academic organizations.