



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc.

1219 N Santa Rita Ave  
The University of Arizona  
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850  
520 626-9095 fax  
caf@mesana.org  
www.mesana.org



January 21, 2014

Michael A. McRobbie  
President, Indiana University  
Bryan Hall 200  
107 S. Indiana Ave.  
Bloomington, IN 47405  
via email: [iupres@iu.edu](mailto:iupres@iu.edu)

Dear President McRobbie,

I am writing on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about your response to the recent decision of the American Studies Association (ASA) to “honor the call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.”

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to defending academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

MESA has thus far not expressed any position on the decision of the ASA regarding relations with Israeli institutions of higher education. However, MESA’s Committee on Academic Freedom is on record as opposing academic boycotts. We refer you in this connection to the committee’s most substantive intervention on this specific issue, its letter dated May 13, 2005 and directed to the Association of University Teachers in the United Kingdom regarding that association’s decision (reversed soon thereafter) to call on its members to “refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, or joint projects,” with Haifa University and Bar-Ilan University in Israel (available at <http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/committees/academic-freedom/intervention/letters-other.html#roger051305>).

At the same time, MESA’s Committee on Academic Freedom has repeatedly criticized the Israeli government for its violations of the academic freedom of Palestinian faculty, students and institutions of higher education, and more broadly for its restrictions on the right to education of the Palestinians subject to its control, just as it has regularly criticized infringements of, and threats to, academic freedom by other governments in the Middle East and North Africa as well as by colleges, universities, government agencies and other entities in the United States and Canada. All of the committee’s letters since 2001 can be found at <http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/committees/academic-freedom/intervention/index.html>.

In this context, we feel obliged to express our concern about the statement you issued on December 23, 2013, in which you not only condemned “the boycott of institutions of higher education in Israel as proposed by the American Studies Association” but also announced that

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"Indiana University will contact the ASA immediately to withdraw as an institutional member." As an individual you are, of course, entitled to express your views on the ASA's action. However, the unilateral actions that you, in your official capacity, have taken on this contentious issue, without having consulted fully with your faculty, not only appear to violate accepted standards and procedures of faculty governance but may also threaten the principles of academic freedom.

Whatever one thinks of the ASA's recent decision, we believe that university leaders like yourself have a responsibility to foster free and open discussion of even the most contentious issues. University leaders ought therefore to refrain from taking public stances that, by delineating the bounds of permissible discourse, may send a signal to faculty and students that adhering to or expressing publicly certain positions may have deleterious consequences for them. We also note that your statement vigorously denounced the ASA's resolution as a threat to academic freedom without in any way attending to the concerns that the resolution expressed about the violations of the academic freedom of Palestinian faculty and students by the Israeli authorities. Finally, we find it disturbing that your statement indicates that you have, apparently on your own, made a decision concerning the academic affiliations of members of your faculty, an action which undermines their academic freedom.

We therefore call on you to reiterate your firm and unequivocal support for the principles of academic freedom, at Indiana University and elsewhere, including the right of faculty and students to discuss and, if they so choose, advocate for a boycott of Israel academic institutions. We further call on you to retract your decision to terminate Indiana University's institutional membership of the American Studies Association and clarify that you regard this as a matter to be decided by your faculty, with the full participation of those Indiana University faculty members who are members of that association. Finally, we urge you to speak out consistently against all threats to and violations of academic freedom, wherever they occur.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Brown', written in a cursive style.

Nathan Brown

President, Middle East Studies Association and

Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University