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**MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONDEMNS ATTACKS ON ACADEMIC
FREEDOM & AFFIRMS THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION OF FREE SPEECH**

(New Orleans, LA—November 14, 2019) The Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) issued the following statement on the pressing need to continue to combat anti-Semitism while affirming the protection of academic freedoms, at the start of its 53rd Annual Meeting:

MESA is deeply troubled about the rising tide of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the United States. Combatting anti-Semitism and all other forms of racism, bigotry and discrimination is an essential duty for academic associations, colleges, and universities. As part of this duty, MESA is compelled to condemn what appears to be an orchestrated campaign by groups based outside of academia that seek to delegitimize and silence scholarship and teaching with which they disagree. One expression is the conflation of criticism of Israeli actions and policies, and of Zionism as a political ideology, with anti-Semitism. Supporters of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS) have been particular targets of this campaign. Unfortunately, we have recently witnessed statements by university leaders, as well as by politicians, government officials and legislative bodies, that manifest this kind of conflation, thereby posing a grave danger to academic freedom and to the constitutionally protected right of free speech.

As the MESA membership affirmed in its 2015 resolution, all political speech, including criticism of any government or ideology and advocacy for any group's rights, is, and must remain, constitutionally protected in the United States. At our institutions of higher education this constitutional protection must be accompanied by a rigorous adherence to the standards and traditions of academic freedom.

For more information or for an interview, please contact Jeffrey Reger at jeff@mesana.org.