March 6, 2025

Dear President Wolfson, Vice President Lumbantobing, and Council Members,

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) are writing to express our deep concern regarding the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) March 6, 2025, webinar titled "Scholasticide in Palestine" which was endorsed by a Council Member and promoted to the full AAUP membership. While we fully support academic freedom, open inquiry, and the right to discuss a range of complex geopolitical issues, we are troubled by the framing of and publicity surrounding this event, which promotes a one-sided narrative demonizing Israel, and perpetuates falsehoods that have no place within a scholarly association.

As organizations that represent faculty nationwide, including longtime AAUP members, and which are fiercely committed to the principle of unfettered academic exchange, we have waited to share our concerns until after the webinar took place so that our correspondence with you would not be misread or misinterpreted as a call to have this misguided event cancelled. Accordingly, we are now writing to you to highlight how we, and many professors with whom we have engaged in recent days about this webinar, feel that this event undermined the work of the AAUP in numerous ways:

1. **Disseminating highly contested information with no opportunity for rebuttal:** The language used in the event's description – including "scholasticide" and "exterminationist" – suggests the adoption and promotion of a one-sided and inflammatory narrative which deviates from the mission of the AAUP to promote balanced and informed discourse. There is no evidence of any intent by Israel to "systemically destroy" the education system in Gaza or elsewhere. The destruction of institutions, including educational ones, is a tragic byproduct of war, exacerbated when terror groups like Hamas embed their operations within school buildings and other civilian centers. Furthermore, the lack of any reference in the event's promotional material to the October 7, 2023 massacre in Israel, the worst instance of the mass murder of Jews on a single day since the Holocaust, which instigated the Israel-Hamas war and all of its attendant destruction, is a serious omission. It ignores the traumas, suffering, and lived experiences of Israelis and others on that horrific day, thereby disrespecting many Jewish members of your organization for whom an attachment to Israel and global Jewry is a core component of their faith identity.
2. **Contributing to the alienation of Jewish members:** With antisemitism already on the rise, such inaccurate, demonizing language as is found in the publicity promoting the March 6 webinar can contribute to a polarized and hostile environment, particularly in academic spaces where tensions are already high. In the last year, many Jewish and Zionist faculty have reported feeling isolated, marginalized, and even targeted within the AAUP and other professional associations and scholarly societies. It is crucial that discussions around such sensitive topics are grounded in factual evidence and presented in a manner that encourages constructive debate and dialogue rather than division.

3. **Deviating from AAUP's mission:** The AAUP's admirable mission is to advance academic freedom and define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education. Yet, when AAUP leadership hosts and promotes an event that frames the complex Israel-Hamas war in a one-sided manner, the association deviates from this mission by stifling intellectual exchange and critical inquiry. It is essential for academic institutions to foster learning environments where diverse perspectives are explored and debated, rather than promoting partisan orthodoxies and unsubstantiated and contested theories as settled truth. Indeed, the "scholasticide" charge has not been subjected to rigorous empirical scrutiny and has been widely challenged, including by prominent scholars who are longtime AAUP members. By endorsing biased events, the AAUP risks undermining its commitment to fostering an inclusive and intellectually rigorous academic community and alienates many members who joined the AAUP based on its stated mission.
4. **Eroding credibility and reputation:** The credibility and reputation of an academic association are built on its ability to support nuanced, principled, and evidence-based discourse. The endorsement of highly contested terms like "scholasticide" can erode this credibility, as it suggests a departure from the association's responsibility to uphold rigorous academic standards. Such framing not only risks alienating members of the academic community but also diminishes the association's standing as a reliable and trustworthy source of scholarly dialogue. At a time when many perceive the American academy to be under unfair attacks, professional associations such as the AAUP should appreciate the importance of holding fast to, and uniting membership around, the core and fundamental principles of the academy.

We note with dismay that this divisive event is taking place within a wider context of the AAUP being perceived as increasingly moving in a virulently anti-Israel direction, and as a result, growing insensitive and even hostile to the concerns of its Jewish and Zionist members. From accepting the validity of academic boycotts, despite those being in fundamental opposition to academic freedom, to endorsing one-sided events such as the one that took place on March 6, the AAUP has of late departed from its values of promoting open inquiry and unfettered intellectual exchange.

We urge you to consider the broader impact of this event, reassess its polarizing stances, and use this opportunity to reaffirm the association's commitment to its core values and to ensure that it remains a welcoming, inclusive, and intellectually rigorous space for all academics and scholars. Specifically, we call on you to implement the following next steps:

1. Organize a webinar event featuring scholars, including Israeli and Palestinian academics, who would refute the "scholasticide" charge and other claims presented in the March 6 webinar, including the ways in which academic freedom has long been violated on campuses in the West Bank and Gaza by Palestinian governing authorities and societal groups. We urge you to promote and to publicize this online event to the AAUP membership in the same manner as the March 6 event.
2. Offer professional development opportunities and trainings to AAUP leadership and staff so that they can better understand contemporary antisemitism and the needs and concerns of the association's Jewish and Zionist members.

3. Forcefully and unequivocally condemn the uptick in the shunning, ostracizing, and marginalizing of Israeli academics, a concerning development which has been well documented in recent studies and surveys published in recent months. Notwithstanding the AAUP's reversal of its longstanding categorical opposition to the boycott of academic institutions, which we and many other organizations committed to academic freedom and open inquiry have criticized, we hope that your new stance will not prevent you from standing with individual Israeli academics who are now facing severe professional costs as a result of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions).
4. Facilitate opportunities for AAUP members to share their experiences encountering antisemitism and anti-Israel bias within their disciplines and academic communities. Recent studies, reports, and testimony by faculty across multiple areas of study in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Medical and related fields, highlights a pernicious rise of anti-Jewish hate, harassment, and discrimination. We hope that the AAUP will support the efforts of its members to expose and address this intolerable situation.

We look forward to the possibility of working together to create a more inclusive and informed academic community. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can be of further assistance in implementing the next steps that we have highlighted above as critically important and necessary.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Greenblatt
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