

Academic Freedom and Educational Opportunity Worldwide:
A White Paper from the Alliance for Academic Freedom
December 2019

On January 5, 2020, two [resolutions](#) will come before the business meeting of the American Historical Association criticizing the state of Israel for infringements on educational opportunity and academic freedom. With their exclusive focus on Israel, the resolutions logically imply—wrongly, in our view—that whatever infringements occur in the Occupied Territories are uniquely worthy of the AHA’s concern.

The AAF believes these resolutions should be defeated.

It is not the proper role of the AHA to wade into complex, controversial international disputes—especially on topics like Middle East politics over which people of goodwill have long disagreed. The AHA has never had its own foreign policy and should not start now. On the rare occasions where the AHA does take a public stance, its own rules (see the AHA’s “Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance”) require it to do so in a way that is fair and commensurate with the problems under review. It is well documented that scores of nations around the globe restrict education rights and academic freedom in ways far more severe than Israel’s actions. But, contrary to AHA principles, the current resolutions do not defend “the rights of historians in the United States to travel to *all* foreign countries in order to study, teach, pursue research or simply carry on discussions with other historians.” Instead, they wrongly select only one country to be censured, offering no reason for choosing Israel alone.¹

The members of the AAF are self-identified liberals and progressives who are critical, individually and collectively, of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians, including the Occupation, and supportive of both Palestinian and Jewish national aspirations. We reject the binary approach to the conflict that seeks to justify one side or the other as all right or all wrong and then marshals evidence to prove a case of complete guilt or total exoneration. Scholarship and fairness require a more difficult, thoughtful approach. As academics, we recognize the subjective perspectives of individuals and peoples but strive to apply rigorous standards to research and analysis rather than to subsume academic discipline to political expediency. The following is an effort to provide some context about academic freedom and educational opportunity worldwide as a basis for understanding why the resolutions do not merit support.

I. Academic Freedom: A Worldwide Problem

Many countries around the world have exceedingly poor records in respecting academic freedom and advancing education. Given these widespread problems, Israel would not strike a reasonable observer as the proper place for a U.S. scholarly society to train its focus. Many countries have no interest in academic freedom whatsoever. China, Russia, and other authoritarian countries expel, imprison, and punish students and scholars for the nature of their research or political views. Some deny education to whole classes of citizens, such as women. Recent months have seen many flagrant abuses in the headlines including:

¹ “Guiding Principles on Taking a Public Stance,” American Historical Association, June 2017. AHA website. <https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/guiding-principles-on-taking-a-public-stance>

- Hungary’s right-wing prime minister Viktor Orban made war on the Central European University and ultimately forced it to leave his country for Austria;
- Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan has had hundreds of academics fired and prosecuted for opposing his increasingly authoritarian rule;
- India shut down schools for 1.5 million Kashmiri children as militancy grew in the province in response to India’s revocation of autonomy for the region;
- Indian police in December violently attacked students at Jamia Millia Islamia University and Aligarh Muslim University who were protesting a new anti-Muslim citizenship law;
- Chinese police raided Hong Kong University to apprehend pro-democracy students and shut down their protests;
- Iran has used force against its university students to quash reform protests there.

These offenses have drawn criticism from human rights organizations. *But those bodies that issue annual reports on human rights have never placed Israel among the leading offenders against academic freedom.*² If the AHA were to pass any resolution on this subject, it should focus on those countries that are the foremost offenders, not Israel.

China as a Major Offender

Of all the countries that violate their peoples’ right to unfettered learning, China is probably the most flagrant. The government practices censorship, imprisons dissidents, and limits publication, discussion, and internet use. China’s leader, Xi Jinping, has vowed to make his colleges into “strongholds that adhere to Party leadership,” and to force curricula to “adhere to correct political orientation.”³ The Communist Party forbids the discussion of ideas such as “the promotion of Western constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society [and] a free press,” according to the organization Scholars at Risk (SAR). A September 2019 SAR report catalogued Chinese efforts to “intimidate, silence and punish academics and students.” These include “limits on internet access, libraries and publication imports that impair research and learning; orders to ban discussion and research on topics the Party-state deems controversial; surveillance and monitoring of academic activity that result in loss of position and self-censorship; travel restrictions that disrupt the flow of ideas across borders; and the use of detentions, prosecutions and other coercive tactics to retaliate against and constrain critical inquiry and expression.” SAR further notes that academics in Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region suffer under even more onerous restrictions, including the detention of some one million people in re-education camps. SAR documents as well restrictions placed on Chinese students and scholars overseas, including “reports of scholars and students

² U.S. Department of State, “[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#),” accessed Dec. 15, 2019. The Obama administration came to similar conclusions. See, for example, John F. Kerry, “[Secretary’s Preface](#),” U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014. Kerry’s letter cited China, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand. See also the Freedom House report, “Freedom in the World, 2019,” which lists Central African Republic, Libya, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Eritrea, Syria, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, South Sudan, and Turkmenistan as “Worst of the Worst.” See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>; country scores at https://freedomhouse.org/report/countries-world-freedom-2019?order=field_fiw_aggregate_score&sort=desc

³ Simon Denyer, “[China’s president takes campaign for ideological purity into universities, schools](#),” *Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 2016.

experiencing surveillance, intimidation and coercive legal action, and apparent efforts by PRC officials and their allies to constrain expression on foreign campuses.”⁴

Universities in China dismiss scholars for “incorrect” beliefs. In 2018, Beijing government representatives and Hong Kong legislators campaigned to dismiss Benny Tai, a law professor at the University of Hong Kong, for pro-democratization comments.⁵ Tai and sociology professor Chan Kin-man were previously prosecuted for their liberal views. Before that, in 2013, Peking University dismissed Professor Xia Yeliang, an economist and free market advocate, for his writings and beliefs.⁶ In 2012, Wang Peijian, a law professor at Jiliang University in Zhejiang Province, was compelled against his will to attend a “psychiatric facility” because he shared his political views on his campus.⁷ Many more such examples exist.

The brutal 2019 crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong stands as the most prominent recent case of Chinese academic repression. Authorities have progressively reduced the autonomy once enjoyed by educational institutions in Hong Kong and Macau⁸ while targeting pro-democracy students and scholars. In 2019, police forces mounted a bloody raid on Hong Kong University. Hundreds of protesting students were arrested and dozens injured; student leader Alex Chow Tsz-lok died.⁹ The raid forced the cancellation of classes and the evacuation of students.¹⁰ A Chinese group of academics called the Scholars’ Alliance for Academic Freedom (unrelated to our group) decried the police action as lawless, condemning its needless violence.¹¹

Despite China’s hostility to the open exchange of ideas, dozens of U.S. universities operate campuses or programs there. American administrators have turned a blind eye to China’s hostility to academic freedom. In November, it was reported that NYU’s Shanghai campus capitulated to Chinese demands and added a propagandistically pro-government course to its curriculum.¹² Columbia University’s Global Center in Beijing reportedly scuttled lectures in 2015 to avoid upsetting Chinese authorities. At Alfred University in upstate New York the provost had researcher Rachelle Peterson removed from campus for investigating the Chinese government’s role. The Confucius Institutes that China has set up at more than 100 American universities—called “an important part of China’s overseas propaganda apparatus” by Chinese Communist Party officials—limit who can speak about China and what can be said.¹³ Orville

⁴ Scholars at Risk, “[Obstacles to Excellence: Academic Freedom & China’s Quest for World-Class Universities](#),” Sep. 24, 2019.

⁵ Mimi Leung and Yojana Sharma, “[Dismay over pro-China hounding of Hong Kong scholar](#),” *University World News*, Apr. 6, 2018.

⁶ Chris Buckley, “[Outspoken Chinese Professor Says He Was Dismissed](#),” *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 2013.

⁷ “[Surveillance, Psychiatric Detention Limit Academic Freedom](#),” *China Media Bulletin*, 77, Freedom House, Dec. 14, 2012.

⁸ Elizabeth Redden, “[New Report on Academic Freedom and China](#),” *Inside Higher Ed*, Sep. 24, 2019.

⁹ Austin Ramzy and Ezra Cheung, “[Anger in Hong Kong After Student Dies from Fall Following Clash with Police](#),” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2019.

¹⁰ Edward Wong and Ezra Cheung, “[Hong Kong Colleges Become Besieged Citadels as Police Close In](#),” *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 2019.

¹¹ “[Police action in universities unlawful: academics](#),” Radio Television Hong Kong, Nov. 12, 2019.

¹² Theo Wray, “[NYU Shanghai Quietly Added Pro-Government Course at Behest of Chinese Government](#),” *Vice News*, Nov. 20, 2019.

¹³ Isaac Stone Fish, “[The Other Political Correctness](#): Why are America’s elite universities censoring themselves on China?” *The New Republic*, Sep. 4, 2018.

Schell of the Asia Society, noted: “One has to pay a price: one has to play by the rules of China’s game, and a university committed to academic freedom is bound to run into problems.”¹⁴ In short, in any ranking of nations warranting concern from American academics, China would rate at the top of the list.

Iran as a Major Offender

Of the many countries besides China that commit similarly serious violations, Iran is perhaps the next most prominent case. In protests during the fall of 2019, which swept the country, authorities shut down schools in Tehran and other cities.¹⁵ Hundreds of university students have been detained in the last two years for protesting; at least 19 were sentenced to prison. Even before the recent uprising, Iran was notorious for its lack of academic freedom. Students are frequently jailed for political reasons—or no reason at all. In November 2019, the courts upheld a verdict of seven-years in prison and 74 lashes for Parisa Rafiei, a photography student and activist at the University of Tehran, in a case in which her own university secretly cooperated in gathering evidence against her.¹⁶ Also in November, courts sentenced eight conservation biologists affiliated with the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation to multi-year prison terms—after a secret trial on phony spying charges—and a ninth colleague died in custody following his arrest.¹⁷ In April 2019 Iranian authorities sentenced Hakim Sabzevari University student Mojtaba Dadashi to three years in prison and 74 lashes for tweeting, “This regime is neither Islamic, nor a republic, nor revolutionary.”¹⁸

Not only Iranian academics face political arrest. So do foreign scholars, including visitors from the United States, Britain, France, and Australia. Princeton University history graduate student Xiyue Wang, a U.S. citizen who was in Iran doing doctoral research, was sequestered in Iran’s Evin Prison for three years after being found guilty on trumped-up espionage charges, which the U.N. called a “clear violation” of international law; he was only recently freed in a prisoner swap.¹⁹ Others jailed recently include Islamic Studies scholar Kylie Moore-Gilbert and anthropologists Fariba Adelkhah and Kameel Ahmady.²⁰

In 2012, seventeen human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, issued a report decrying “the alarming state of academic freedom in the Islamic Republic of Iran.” The report noted “violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly on campuses; and institutionalized procedures that allow authorities arbitrarily to expel and suspend students, and fire graduate instructors on the basis of their political views or activities.” It noted that “over six hundred students, as well as some university lecturers, have been arrested since 2009, many of whom have subsequently been imprisoned, and

¹⁴ Isaac Stone Fish, “[No Academic Freedom for China](#),” *The Daily Beast*, Nov. 22, 2011.

¹⁵ “[Schools Closed and Internet Blocked Across Iran](#),” *Iran Wire*, Nov. 18, 2019.

¹⁶ “[University Helped Build Sham Court Case against Young Student Activist, Source Reveals](#),” Center for Human Rights in Iran, Nov. 26, 2019.

¹⁷ “[Academics Should Not Need to Live in Fear for the Pursuit of Their Science](#),” *Nature*, Nov. 27, 2019.

¹⁸ Scott Lucas, “[Iran Daily: Student Given 3-Year Sentence for Sharing Video on Twitter](#),” *EA Worldview*, Apr. 12, 2019.

¹⁹ Marcia Brown, “[Vigil Supports Imprisoned Grad Student](#),” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Dec. 4, 2019.

²⁰ Jason Rezaian, “[Iran’s Hostage Factory](#),” *Washington Post*, Nov. 4, 2019.

hundreds deprived of education, as a result of their political activities.”²¹ Iran also explicitly restricts academic opportunities for women. In September 2012, some thirty Iranian universities enacted rules banning women from eight different degree courses, including engineering, nuclear physics, computer science, English literature, archaeology and business.²² More recently, in May 2019, Basij, or paramilitary units, violently attacked students protesting compulsory hijab laws at the University of Tehran.²³

Other Examples

In many other countries, too, scholars are imprisoned for what they write and say. In the last year alone these include:

- Syria’s detention of Rakan Al-Safadi, a scholar of literature at Qalamoun University;
- Myanmar’s prosecution of eight students for a peaceful march commemorating the 1962 university protests;
- Egypt’s arrest of economist Omar el-Shenety of the American University in Cairo and the London School of Economics for electoral activities;
- Ghana’s detention of Augustine Uzoma Nwagbara, a Nigerian visiting lecturer at the University of Education Winneba (UEW), for criticizing the high fees charged by Ghanaian universities;

and many more.

Provisional governments and terrorist entities such as ISIS show no respect for academic values at all. Though it did not elicit a condemnation from the AHA, ISIS shocked the world when it destroyed historical antiquities in Iraq and Syria. UNESCO called the destruction of the Temple of Baalshamin in Palmyra “a new war crime and an immense loss for the Syrian people and for humanity.”²⁴ ISIS publicly beheaded Khalid al-Asaad, the retired 83-year-old chief archaeologist of the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, beloved for the custody of Palmyra’s majestic history. According to reports, “His blood-soaked body was then suspended with red twine by its wrists from a traffic light, his head resting on the ground between his feet, his glasses still on.”²⁵ A few years before, the African militant group Ansar Dine’s destruction of centuries-old shrines in Timbuktu, recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, elicited no protest from the AHA.²⁶

Not only nakedly authoritarian regimes violate norms of academic freedom. Countries that label themselves democracies, such as Singapore and Turkey, restrict it in egregious ways.

²¹ Human Rights Watch Report: “[Iran: Government Assault on Academic Freedom; Students, Faculty Expelled, Imprisoned for Political Views](#),” May 31, 2012.

²² Fariba Sahraei, “[Iranian University Bans on Women Causes Consternation](#),” *BBC News*, Sep. 22, 2012.

²³ “Paramilitary Force Attacks Tehran University Protest Against Hijab Enforcement Units,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, May 13, 2019.

²⁴ Anne Barnard, “[ISIS Speeds Up Destruction of Antiquities in Syria](#),” *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 2015.

²⁵ Ben Hubbard, “[Syrian Expert Who Shielded Palmyra Antiquities Meets a Grisly Death at ISIS’ Hands](#),” *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 2015.

²⁶ Tiemoko Diallo and Adama Diarra, “[Mali Islamists Attack UNESCO Holy Site in Timbuktu](#),” Reuters, May 5, 2012.

Especially since the failed 2016 coup, Turkey has aggressively jailed academics for their politics; Scholars at Risk cited 40 such prosecutions of academics and 9 cases of imprisonment in the last year alone. SAR also noted problems in democracies such as India, South Africa, and South Korea.²⁷ Indeed, among more than 240 incidents of infringement on academic freedom that SAR recorded in 2019, many countries could boast multiple incidents, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Greece, India, South Africa, Turkey, and Uganda.

Notably, however, Scholars at Risk cited no incidents in Israel. The few incidents reported in the Palestinian Territories included both Israeli efforts to put down violent student activity at universities and officials of the Palestinian Authority abducting and imprisoning a student at An-Najah National University.²⁸ All of this information, too, calls into question the appropriateness of a resolution focusing on Israel alone.

II. Issue #1: Freedom to Travel

The main issue highlighted by the proposed AHA resolutions is the freedom to travel to pursue research or studies or participate in conferences. All countries restrict visas, and Israel's restrictions, rooted in security concerns, resemble those in other liberal democracies. Australia permits its Minister for Home Affairs to cancel the visa of a visitor likely to "incite discord in the Australian community" or endanger a portion thereof. Canada's Minister of Immigration may deny temporary residence to anyone prone to "incite hatred that is likely to lead to violence against a specific group" or "promote or glorify terrorist violence." France refuses entry to those deemed a threat to public order.²⁹ Less-open regimes bar entry or exit to individuals based on their political views, their religion, or their national identities. Roughly 20 countries bar admission to holders of Israeli passports.

Some recent examples of travel restrictions include:

- Turkey detained, for months on end, the French-Turkish mathematician Ahmet Tuna Altinel as well as a medical professor from Inonu University, unnamed in media reports, and arrested dozens of other academics;³⁰
- Vietnam deported to France the dissident mathematician Pham Minh Hoang in 2017 after stripping him of his citizenship;³¹
- Cameroon authorities in 2017 arrested Patrice Nganang, a literature professor at SUNY Stony Brook, refusing him exit from the country after he criticized government policies;³²

²⁷ Jess C. Scott, "[Academic Freedom in Singapore?](#)" *The Online Citizen*, Feb. 23, 2014; Chun Han Wong, "[Singapore Professor Denied Tenure, Sparks Academic Freedom Debate](#)," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 1, 2013.

²⁸ <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2019-04-08-an-najah-national-university/>

²⁹ See, for example, "[The International Comparative Legal Guide to Corporate Immigration 2019](#)," 6th Edition, Global Legal Group; Government of Canada, "[Guidelines for the Negative Discretion Authority](#)"; "[Refugee Law and Policy: France](#)," Library of Congress.

³⁰ Dolunay Bulut, "[Second incarceration in a week: Peace academic Tuna Altinel arrested in Balikesir](#)," *Endangered Scholars Worldwide*, May 16, 2019.

³¹ Julia Wallace, "[With Social Media, Vietnam's Dissidents Grow Bolder Despite Crackdown](#)," *New York Times*, July 2, 2017.

³² "[Cameroonian-American Writer Patrice Nganang Abducted at Airport and Detained](#)," PEN America press release, Dec. 7, 2017.

- Morocco denied egress to historian Maati Monjib, who was seeking to attend conferences in Spain and Norway;³³
- Ukraine denied entry to several academics who had criticized the government;³⁴

Such practices, though widespread throughout the world, have not occasioned any outcry from those calling for the AHA to stand against Israel. Any AHA resolution raising concerns about international travel restrictions should consider the range of restrictions around the world.

IIA. Restrictions on Travel by Academics in Democracies

Travel Restrictions by the United States

The above examples make clear that democracies as well as dictatorships restrict academic travel. The United States is among the offenders. While the AAF believes it is not the role of the AHA to wade into the immigration decisions of national governments, it makes even less sense for the AHA to target Israel's policies on academics' travel without addressing occasions when the United States itself engages in similar behavior.

In the U.S., “unexpected denials and long delays have become increasingly common for international students and scholars seeking visas,” the *New York Times* reported in August, citing Trump administration policies. Visitors from Ethiopia, China, India, and elsewhere were blocked.³⁵ Trump’s Presidential Proclamation 9645 a version of his “Travel Ban,” has made visa denials to students from Syria and other countries routine.³⁶ In August 2019, an incoming Harvard University undergraduate, Ismail Ajjawi, a Palestinian student from Lebanon, was denied entry because customs officials found suspicious social media posts on his phone and laptop; after protests and the interference of Harvard’s president, the decision was reversed.³⁷ (Hammas has previously prevented other Palestinians in the same program from leaving Gaza.) Many other barred students, despite being enrolled at American colleges, were kept from starting their studies in the fall 2019 semester.³⁸ Over the summer a dozen or more Iranian students planning graduate study in the U.S. had their visas canceled. In August, U.S. officials stopped nine Chinese Arizona State students at LAX airport and sent back to China.³⁹ In May 2019, German communications scholar Kerem Schamberger was refused a visa to give a talk on the role of popular media in Kurdistan at a meeting of the International Communication Association.⁴⁰

³³ Aziz el-Yaakoubi, “[Moroccan Intellectual Collapses after Hunger Strike over Ban](#),” *Reuters*, Oct. 14, 2015.

³⁴ Roman Olearchyk, “[Businessmen and Academics Denied Entry to Ukraine](#),” *CNBC.com*, Dec. 23, 2013.

³⁵ Anemona Hartocollis, “[International Students Face Hurdles Under Trump Administration Policy](#),” *New York Times*, Aug. 28, 2019.

³⁶ Maeve Higgins, “[It’s Heartbreaking for Us: Syrian Students’ Struggle to Study in the U.S.](#),” *Time*, Nov. 27, 2019.

³⁷ Anemona Hartocollis, “[Palestinian Harvard Student Blocked From Coming to U.S. Is Allowed to Enter](#),” *New York Times*, Sep. 3, 2019.

³⁸ Alia Wong, “[Colleges Face Growing International Student-Visa Issues](#),” *Atlantic*, Sep. 6, 2019.

³⁹ Rachel Leingang, “[9 Arizona State students from China detained at LA airport, denied admission to U.S.](#),” *USA Today*, Aug. 30, 2019.

⁴⁰ Kerem Schamberger, “[Walling Off the Ivory Tower](#),” *Jacobin*, Aug. 13, 2019.

Such problems go back a ways. In 2017, the Jewish, Egyptian-born French historian Henry Rousso, arriving at the Houston airport for a lecture at Texas A&M University, was held by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents for ten hours and nearly deported before being allowed to remain. In the past the U.S. denied entry to BDS activist Omar Barghouti, Islamist philosopher Tariq Ramadan (who was later admitted when the State Department reconsidered his case, although it came far too late for him to assume his position at Notre Dame),⁴¹ Adam Habib of the University of Johannesburg (whose exclusion U.S. courts rejected because the State Department failed to prove the terrorist associations against him), and Kerim Yildiz, a U.K.-based advocate for Kurdish human rights.⁴² The United States has a long record, even before the Trump administration began, of questionable academic travel restrictions. Before taking up the case of Israel, it would be more proper to look at U.S. policy first.

Travel Restrictions by the United Kingdom

The problem in the United Kingdom—the United States’ closest ally—is also severe and yet receives no mention in these proposed resolutions. The Wellcome Trust, which sponsors health research, compiled roughly 100 cases in which academics, mainly from African countries, were blocked from attending conferences in the UK, mostly for illegitimate reasons. The African Studies Association UK reported that the government refused 17 foreign delegates entry to go to its 2018 conference at Birmingham University.⁴³ In 2019 the UK denied visas to the daughters of an American geographer, Amber Murrey, who had been hired by Oxford University. The same month, the Home Office refused a visa to Elizabeth Ford, a music historian on fellowship at Oxford, allowing her just two weeks to leave after eight years in the UK, on the grounds that her last visa was granted in error.⁴⁴ In 2018 it refused entry to Nadza Dzinalija, an Amsterdam University student from Bosnia, 21, who sought to attend a psychology conference.⁴⁵ In 2016 it denied entry to anthropology PhD student Sabine Parrish, holding her in airport detention overnight for not having the funds to pay for a year of graduate study.⁴⁶ Also that year, it arrested an American Shakespeare scholar, Paul Hamilton, a recent PhD from the University of Birmingham, at his home, and jailed and deported him because he allegedly did not have enough close friends in the area.⁴⁷ In number and apparent arbitrariness, these visa denials outstrip anything Israel is alleged to have done yet go unmentioned in the resolutions before the AHA.

Travel Restrictions in Other Democracies

Other democracies also restrict academic travel. Canada drew fire in November 2019 for denying visas to AI researchers from many African countries.⁴⁸ In March 2019, visa delays or

⁴¹ Megan Specia, “Palestinian Boycott Activist Denied Entry to United States,” *New York Times*, Apr. 11, 2019; Sarah Lyall, “In Shift, U.S. Lifts Visa Curbs on Professor,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 2010.

⁴² Kirk Semple, “[Advocate’s Visa Delay Stirs Questions](#),” *New York Times*, Sep. 29, 2011; Nusrat Choudhury, “[Banned From America For Political Views?](#)” ACLU website, Oct. 24, 2013.

⁴³ Tom Whipple, “[Refusing academic visas is threat to Britain’s reputation](#),” *Times of London*, Nov. 8, 2018.

⁴⁴ Anna Fazackerly, “[Oxford professor’s children refused visas to join her in UK](#),” *Guardian*, Oct. 1, 2019.

⁴⁵ “[Amsterdam University student denied entry to UK for conference](#),” *Dutch News NL*, Oct. 22, 2018.

⁴⁶ Sabine Parrish, “[Eight hours in airport detention for wanting to talk about a course? Welcome to the UK](#),” *Times Higher Education*, Feb. 22, 2016.

⁴⁷ John Morgan for Times Higher Education, “[Shakespeare Scholar, Detained](#),” *Inside Higher Ed*, Jan. 29, 2016.

⁴⁸ “[Canada refuses visas to over a dozen African AI researchers](#),” BBC, Nov. 15, 2019.

denials kept perhaps 100 participants from attending the annual meeting of the International Studies Association in Toronto.⁴⁹ A leading scholar from India was refused an Australian visa to take work at the University of Melbourne allegedly because his work was “associated with weapons of mass destruction.”⁵⁰ India in 2018 imposed visa restrictions on scholars of Pakistani origin planning to attend an Association for Asian Studies Conference at Ashoka University in New Delhi.⁵¹ Chile deported visiting Peruvian university students Michael Peña, Eduardo Pillaca and Carla de la Cruz.⁵² Many other countries can be cited for similar offenses.

The Right to Challenge Travel Restrictions in Democracies

In the United States and other liberal democracies, legal procedures exist to contest and overturn visa denials, deportations, and other immigration decisions. In some of the cases in the U.S. cited above, courts forced the overturning of State Department decisions. This happens as well in Israel, which has an independent judiciary—which, for example, overturned an initial decision not to admit Lara Alqasem, a Palestinian-American, for study at Hebrew University.⁵³ *For more on her case and the Israeli appeals process, see the AAF document, “Two Flawed Resolutions: Errors, Misrepresentations, and Omissions in the Resolutions Before the AHA.”*

Freedom to travel to pursue scholarship and education is an important right. To have credibility and moral authority, any resolution adopted by the AHA should consider what restrictions exist in all kinds of countries around the world and to what degree they are meaningfully justiciable.

IIB. Restrictions on Travel by Academics under Authoritarian Regimes

Under authoritarian regimes, restrictions on academic travel are more severe than they are in the United States, the UK, Israel, or other democracies.

Travel Restrictions by China

China again constitutes a prominent example. It routinely denies visas to foreign scholars for political reasons. Among these are eminent Sinologists such as Edward Friedman of the University of Wisconsin, Marie Holzman of the Université Paris Diderot, Perry Link of the University of California at Riverside, James Millward of Georgetown University, Andrew Nathan of Columbia University, and Elliot Sperling of Indiana University.⁵⁴ China also refuses for ideological reasons to let scholars *leave* the country, among them Feng Chongyi of the University of Technology, Sydney; Sheng Hong and Jiang Hao of the Unirule Institute of

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Redden, “[Conference Visa Woes... in Canada](#),” *Inside Higher Ed*, Mar. 28, 2019.

⁵⁰ Ranjit Devraj, “[Row over Australian visa rejection for top researcher](#),” *University World News*, Aug. 19, 2016.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Redden, “[No Pakistani Scholars Allowed](#),” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 8, 2018.

⁵² “[Students Found Carrying Marxist Literature Deported](#),” *Scholars at Risk*, Jan. 27, 2017.

⁵³ Ruth Eglash, “[Court permits U.S. student to enter Israel, despite attempt to ban her over BDS ties](#),” *Washington Post*, Oct. 18, 2018.

⁵⁴ Edward Wong, “[China Denies Entry to an American Scholar Who Spoke Up for a Uighur Colleague](#),” *New York Times*, July 7, 2014; “[Banned in China, with Andrew J. Nathan](#),” *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, Aug. 15, 2018; James A. Millward, “[Being Blacklisted by China, and What Can Be Learned from It](#),” *Medium*, Dec. 28, 2017; SAR, “Obstacles to Excellence,” 30.

Economics (who sought to attend a conference at Harvard University); and human rights attorney Chen Jiangan (who sought to visit the U.S. for the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program on law and human rights). “The reasons cannot be explicitly stated; we just can’t let you leave the country,” Chen was told at the Beijing airport. And China restricts its citizens’ movement within the country. People who live in urban areas that do not have a “hukou,” or internal passport, are deemed “temporary residents” and, as the *Washington Post* reported, cannot enjoy “subsidized public housing, public education beyond elementary school, public medical insurance and government welfare payments.”⁵⁵

Travel Restrictions by Russia

Russia often expels foreign scholars without justification. In June 2019, St. Petersburg State University administrators expelled Lukas Latz, a visiting graduate student from Germany, in apparent retaliation for his academic work on environmental movements in Russia and ordered him to leave the country; he is barred until 2023.⁵⁶ In November 2017, Russian security officials detained and then deported Henryk Glebocki, a historian from Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance after his academic talk questioning official accounts of the Stalinist purges in Poland of 1937 and 1938. They forbade Glebocki from using Russian archives.⁵⁷ Previously, Russian police and immigration officials physically removed scholars conducting research in state archives, while others were punished with fines.⁵⁸

Travel Restrictions in the Arab World

Around the Arab world, the freedom to travel for scholarly purposes remains an acute problem. Many Arab states bar entry to anyone with an Israeli passport or even an Israeli stamp in a foreign passport. In 2015 Kuwait Airways was found to have violated U.S. law by refusing to sell a ticket to an Israeli citizen. To avoid serving Israelis, Kuwait Airways eliminated its route between New York and London.⁵⁹ According to Al-Fanar Media, foreign scholars across the region report concern about losing access to the countries that they study if they take up delicate topics or express critical judgments of state policies.⁶⁰

Travel Restrictions by Egypt

In January 2016, Egypt barred Atef Botros, a literature professor at Philipp University of Marburg in Germany, from entering the country, holding him for hours for interrogation. He was told he was banned from entering Egypt for life.⁶¹ The same month, Amel Grami, a Tunisian

⁵⁵ Keith B. Richburg, “[China ‘Hukou’ System Deemed Outdated as Way of Controlling Access to Services](#),” *Washington Post*, Aug., 15 2010.

⁵⁶ Ivan Chesnokov, “[A German student interviewed Russian eco-activists. He was sent home](#),” BBC, June 17, 2019.

⁵⁷ “[Russia Deports Polish Historian After Stalinist Purge Lecture](#),” *Moscow Times*, Nov. 27, 2017.

⁵⁸ Carl Schreck, “[Western Scholars Alarmed by Russian Deportations and Fines](#),” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Mar. 31, 2015.

⁵⁹ “[Kuwait Airways Drops New York-London Route After U.S. Orders It Allows Israelis to Fly](#),” *Haaretz*, Dec. 16, 2015.

⁶⁰ Ursula Lindsey, “[The Door for Many Middle East Scholars is Slamming Shut](#),” *Al-Fanar Media*, Oct. 27, 2015.

⁶¹ Mahmoud Mostafa, “[Egyptian-German researcher receives lifetime ban from entering Egypt](#),” *Egypt Daily News*, Jan. 30, 2016.

expert on terrorism and extremism, was traveling to Alexandria to give a talk when she was held at Cairo International Airport for 14 hours and then sent back to Tunisia.⁶² In July 2015, a French master's student in political sociology at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris, studying in Egypt, was arrested, had her phone and computer confiscated, had her visa revoked, and was ultimately deported—all because she was researching an underground youth movement. In December 2014, Egypt forbade Michelle Dunne, a senior researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, from attending a conference in Egypt, because she was a known critic of the authoritarian government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.⁶³ In addition, Egyptian dissidents have felt compelled to flee the country. Emad el-Din Shahin, an Egyptian political scientist, escaped from Egypt after the government charged him with espionage and sentenced him to death; he now teaches at Georgetown. Amr Hamzawy, a political scientist at the American University in Cairo, was charged with insulting the judiciary and barred from travel.⁶⁴

Egypt also bears responsibility for some of the travel restrictions imposed on Gaza—but its impact on travel in the territories is omitted altogether by these resolutions. *For more detail, see the AAF document, “Two Flawed Resolutions: Errors, Misrepresentations, and Omissions in the Resolutions Before the AHA.”*

Travel Restrictions by the United Arab Emirates

On May 5, 2018, officials of the United Arab Emirates detained Matthew Hedges, a PhD candidate at Durham University (UK) studying Emirati foreign and security policies since the Arab Spring, holding him in solitary confinement. Kept ignorant of the charges against him, Hedges was denied a bed and shower for weeks on end. Sentenced to life in prison, he was ultimately released in late November 2018 after British lobbying.⁶⁵ In 2016, Kristina Bogos, a master's student in Arab Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, was detained upon arrival in Doha, Qatar at the behest of the UAE; Qatar denied her a student visa to study at Georgetown's campus there. The reason was her criticism, while an undergraduate at New York University's Abu Dhabi campus, of the use of migrant workers to build the university's campus on Saadiyat Island.⁶⁶ For similar reasons, the UAE in March 2015 blocked Professor Andrew Ross of New York University from boarding a plane for Abu Dhabi; Ross was planning to research and write critically about NYU's labor practices at its Abu Dhabi campus.⁶⁷ In February 2013, Kristian Ulrichsen of the London School of Economics sought to present a paper in the UAE about recent protests in nearby Bahrain. His own university co-organized the event. But Emirati authorities insisted that his paper be removed from the program. When

⁶² Sarah El-Sheikh, “[Authorities detain Tunisian intellectual at Cairo Airport](#),” *Egypt Daily News*, Jan. 4, 2016.

⁶³ David Kirkpatrick, “[Egypt Denies Entry to American Scholar Critical of Its Government](#),” *NYT*, Dec. 13, 2014; Emir Nader, “[French Student Arrested, Deported from Egypt for Researching](#),” *Egypt Daily News*, July 7, 2015.

⁶⁴ Kirkpatrick, “[Egypt Denies Entry](#),” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 2014; Emad el-Din Shahin, “[Sentenced to Death in Egypt](#),” *Atlantic*, May 19, 2015.

⁶⁵ Matthew Hedges, “[An Ally Held Me as a Spy—And the West Is Complicit](#),” *The Atlantic*, Jan. 25, 2019.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Redden, “[Visa Denied](#),” *Inside Higher Ed*, Jan. 9, 2017.

⁶⁷ Stephanie Saul, “[N.Y.U. Professor Is Barred by United Arab Emirates](#),” *New York Times*, Mar. 16, 2015.

Ulrichsen traveled to Dubai for a talk at another university, he was barred from entering the country owing to his “unhelpful” views “delegitimizing the Bahraini monarchy.”⁶⁸

Travel Restrictions by the Palestinian Governments

Since Hamas took control of Gaza after a 2007 civil war, all parties in the region—Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and Egypt—have imposed travel restrictions either for political reasons or security reasons. Hamas routinely bars Palestinian students from traveling to the U.S., Israel, or elsewhere for educational purposes. Warfare between Hamas and Fatah has led to university closures, the harassment and arrest of academics and students, and violations of academic freedom and basic civil liberties in both Gaza and the West Bank.⁶⁹ And both Hamas and the PA have lagged in providing lists of students approved for admission to foreign universities, impeding their timely travel.⁷⁰ *For more detail on the extent to which Hamas and the Palestinian Authority limit academic travel—and should therefore be included in any resolution that seeks to place blame for such restrictions—see the AAF document, “Two Flawed Resolutions: Errors, Misrepresentations, and Omissions in the Resolutions Before the AHA.”*

III. Issue #2: Broader Denial of Educational Opportunity

Beyond travel restrictions, the resolutions before the AHA refer generally to access to education. Here, too, many countries have shameful records yet go unmentioned in the resolutions. In much of the world, women and girls are denied equal access to schooling. In central African countries, as much as 40 percent of the female primary-school age population does not attend classes. In Pakistan, the figure is 31 percent, Syria 28 percent, Jordan 20 percent.⁷¹ Iran is one of many countries that discriminates on the basis of religion; the Baha’i, whose religion originated in Iran and who constitute Iran’s second-largest religious group, are forbidden to study in universities. A 2019 Pew Research Center report notes that 50 percent of the world’s countries, some 99 in all, provide funds for religious schools or education “with obvious favoritism to a particular group or groups.”⁷² Pew found dozens of countries more restrictive than Israel, with China, Iran, Malaysia, Syria, the Maldives, Russia, Algeria, Egypt, Uzbekistan, and Indonesia topping the list.⁷³ None are mentioned in these resolutions.

⁶⁸ Scott Jaschik, “[Scholar Detained, Meeting Aborted](#),” *Inside Higher Ed*, Feb. 25, 2013; Freedom House, “[UAE Uses Travel Bans to Stifle Dissent](#),” July 3, 2012.

⁶⁹ David Robinson, *The Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza*, (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2010), pp. 34, 42, 44-45.

⁷⁰ “2013 Human Rights Reports: Israel and The Occupied Territories—The Occupied Territories.” <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2013/nea/220358.htm>. See also Abeer Ayyoub, “[Hamas Restricts Travel for Gazans](#),” *Al-Monitor*, Mar. 21, 2013; Elhanan Miller, “[Hamas Imposes Restrictions Keeping Gazans in Strip](#),” *Times of Israel*, Mar. 3, 2013.

⁷¹ UNESCO e-Atlas of Gender Inequality in Education: <https://tellmaps.com/uis/gender/#!/tellmap/-1195952519>

⁷² “[A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the Globe](#),” Pew Research Center Report, July 15, 2019.

⁷³ “[A Closer Look](#),” Pew Research Center Report, July 15, 2019.

Denial of Educational Opportunities by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas

Higher education in the Palestinian territories is run by the Palestinian Authority (in the West Bank) and Hamas (in Gaza). Whatever limitations Israel places on education in the Occupied Territories pale next to those imposed by the PA and Hamas. *Item #7 of the AAF document, “Two Flawed Resolutions: Errors, Misrepresentations, and Omissions in the Resolutions Before the AHA,” details the complete lack of academic freedom in Palestinian universities.* It describes the routine use of harassment and violence (including life-threatening violence) toward those with dissenting views. It lays out the fear of many Palestinians of speaking freely for fear of being branded as traitors. It notes, too, that Palestinian governments restrict travel for academic purposes, as noted above; restrict the ideas that can be discussed on campus; and restrict who can receive education (for example separating student by gender and imposing restrictions on women). And it describes at length how Hamas and other terror groups have circumscribed the educational rights of Israelis with missile attacks over many years that force the closure of schools and universities.

IV. The Proposed Resolutions Offer No Reason for Targeting Israel Exclusively

In the resolutions before the AHA, no reason is offered for the exclusive focus on Israel. In political discussion, people sometimes argue that Israel deserves more scrutiny than such repressive countries as China or Saudi Arabia because it receives significant U.S. foreign aid. This argument does not withstand scrutiny. On this logic, Afghanistan, the largest recipient of U.S. aid in 2017 and the fourth-largest in 2018, should also be included in the resolution, especially given the systemic obstacles to educational opportunity there.⁷⁴ On this logic, too, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian governments—large beneficiaries of U.S. foreign aid—should be included. So should Kenya, Pakistan, and Indonesia. The U.S. supports still other countries through trade, military support, and other means. The U.S. conducted \$737 billion in trade with China in 2018, making China “our largest goods trading partner.”⁷⁵ This sum dwarfs what the U.S. gives in direct aid to Israel and does a great deal to help China’s economy. U.S. trade and support for Israel is also less than with various other countries with worse records are equally deserving of attention, such as India (\$142b annually), Brazil (\$105b) and Saudi Arabia (\$48b, roughly the same as with Israel). Turkey, a NATO ally—a country the U.S. is bound to go to war to defend—is surely also worth similar attention. The United Kingdom, the United States’s closest ally, has elicited great protest with its seemingly unjustified denials of visas to foreign scholars. The U.S. is deeply intertwined with many nations around the world, not only Israel.

Any resolution adopted by the AHA, or any other academic professional society, should take into account the severity and frequency of restrictions on education and scholarship not only in Israel but in these numerous other countries, all with close ties to the U.S., where voices have been raised in protest.

⁷⁴ “[Violence, Tradition Keep Millions of Afghans from School](#),” *Reuters*, Jan. 1, 2011; “[Dedication to Education Forced Teacher to Flee Violence in Afghanistan](#),” International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Dec. 2, 2015. Aid statistics at <https://explorer.usaid.gov/>.

⁷⁵ “[The People’s Republic of China: U.S.-China Trade Facts](#),” Office of the United States Trade Representative.

V. Monitoring Academic Freedom: Whose Job?

Restrictions on academic freedom and access to education are problems that afflict every nation on earth. There is no compelling reason to select Israel alone to be censured by the American Historical Association. Israel is not unique even among democracies or recipients of U.S. assistance. If the AHA is to going to take a public stand about such infringements in any principled fashion, it must do so wherever these problems arise.

We believe it is not feasible or proper for the AHA or other professional organizations in American higher education to take on the task of policing these issues worldwide. To understand many of these issues fully and properly requires a full-time expert staff, of the sort we see at human rights groups like Amnesty International, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, and Scholars at Risk. What the AHA can do is to continue to affiliate with organizations such as the Scholars at Risk network that are already engaged in the project of monitoring academic freedom worldwide. It might also encourage AHA members to affiliate individually with SAR, financially assist the organization, and persuade their home institutions to associate with SAR as well.