

## 2025 LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL NEW BUSINESS FORM

**Date Submitted:**

**Agenda Item #:**

(completed by staff)

Please follow the instructions on the right-hand side. The back of this page provides the Guidelines for Council Resolutions, the APA priorities most recently identified by Council and a space for co-sponsors to sign. **If you have questions, consult a staff person or a member of the Council Leadership Team.**

### **Title: Reaffirming APA's Commitment to Human Rights and Freedom of Expression**

**Mover(s):** Tiffany O'Shaughnessy (Division 35), Innocent Okozi (Division 36), Almas "Ally" Merchant (Division 39), Dana Charatan (Division 39), Kritika Dwivedi (Division 39), David Rivera (Division 44), Sherry C. Wang (Division 45), Brad Olson (Division 48), Michele Ribeiro (Division 49), Sawssan R. Ahmed (AMENA-Psy)

**Representing:** Division 35, Division 36, Division 39, Division 44, Division 45, Division 48, Division 49, AMENA-Psy

**Issue:** The American Psychological Association aspires to be a global leader in advancing psychology in the service of protecting human rights and freedom of expression wherever they are endangered. Today, these rights and freedoms are under attack worldwide, from the Russian Federation to the People's Republic of China to Latin America to the United States to the Middle East and beyond. Here we focus attention on these pressing concerns in the context of the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and surrounding regions, where communities have been devastated by mass trauma, displacement, and loss of life.

Adopting a global framework, APA has appropriately recognized its ethical responsibility to oppose human rights violations and to condemn bigotry in all its forms, including antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism. This responsibility should extend to defending the right of psychologists and the communities they serve to engage in principled advocacy without fear of censorship or retaliation (American Psychological Association, 2017, Principle E; American Psychological Association, 2021; American Psychological Association, 2025). Yet those who have criticized the actions of the Israeli government — including members of our profession — have been unjustly accused of antisemitism and have faced personal

<b>INSTRUCTIONS</b>	
<b>Title:</b> Concise title that accurately reflects the spirit/intent of the main motion.	<b>Mover(s):</b> Identify the author(s) of the item.
<b>Representing:</b> Identify the constituency the author(s) represent.	<b>Issue:</b> Provide a rationale for the motion as well as relevant background information. Avoid extraneous detail.

*\*Please describe, in detail, the way in which the NBI may impact historically and/or currently marginalized or diverse groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, color, culture, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religion, spirituality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, immigration status, national origin, language, military or veteran status, and intersectionality), and/or how people from these groups have been considered and addressed in the NBI.*

*a. Please identify specific groups you believe may be impacted.*

*b. Statements may reference historic or current disparities and any efforts to address them. Specific links to APA strategic goals—particularly related to EDI and global concerns—are encouraged.*

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harassment and professional harm (Abraham, 2011; Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, n.d.; Jewish Voice for Peace, 2025; Landy et al., 2021; Saba et al., 2025).

Upholding the human right of freedom of expression (United Nations, 1948) is an empirically supported strategy for reducing antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism (Byers & Jones, 2020). Freedom of expression increases opportunities for respectful dialogue between groups, which research shows is an effective way to reduce discriminatory attitudes (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). When people share experiences without fear of retaliation, they are more likely to humanize one another, challenge harmful narratives, and counteract misinformation that can lead to biased beliefs (Jetten et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2017). When these rights are denied the resulting isolation, exclusion, and silencing are factors that research has linked to the escalation of hate-motivated violence (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Perry, 2001).

APA has demonstrated its readiness to defend human rights and freedom of expression by turning policy statements into visible and actionable resources during a humanitarian crisis. Following the adoption of the APA Resolution on the War in Ukraine (2022), APA quickly developed and disseminated guidance for psychologists on addressing trauma, displacement, mental health needs, and resources for supporting affected communities (American Psychological Association, 2022). APA has shown the ability to be nimble and produce and implement science-based resources, demonstrating that the APA can act decisively when human rights and well-being are at stake.

Applying the same commitment to follow-through in the context of the current Middle East crisis would ensure that APA's human rights and free expression policies are more than symbolic—that they are operationalized into tangible actions that support psychologists, protect human dignity, and defend freedom of expression (American Psychological Association, 2024; Eidelson, 2024).

### Estimated Costs/Staff Resources:

Staff time will be required to create resources and guidance that are consistent with APA's established practice of operationalizing Council's adopted human rights policies. As demonstrated following the adoption of the 2022 Council Resolution addressing the war in Ukraine, anticipated costs would consist primarily of staff time to develop and disseminate evidence-based guidance within existing APA offices (e.g., Policy, Ethics, Practice, Education, and Communications). Resource development would be informed by internationally recognized mental health and psychosocial support frameworks for humanitarian emergencies, including guidance developed by the World Health Organization (e.g., Mental Health in Emergencies) and the Pan American Health Organization (e.g., MHPSS in Emergencies). Modeled after

**Estimated Costs/Staff Resources:** Provide, to the best of your ability, a realistic assessment of what this will cost. Consult with a staff person if needed.

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the WHO and PAHO frameworks, APA staff time could be directed to creating the following potential deliverables:

An APA web-based resource hub that would include:

1. Evidence based guidance on:
  - a. Psychological impacts of war, displacement, and mass civilian trauma
  - b. Intergroup hatred, moral injury, and collective grief
  - c. The mental health consequences of censorship, silencing, and professional retaliation
2. Resources for psychologists working clinically, academically, and publicly in politically fraught contexts
3. Clear differentiation between:
  - a. Antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism
  - b. Legitimate, non-violent critique of state actions and policies

Provide practice-oriented guidelines or CE-eligible materials for psychologists working amid war, displacement, and political violence. Topics would include:

1. Guidance on supporting individuals and families affected by:
  - a. war trauma and displacement
  - b. vicarious trauma and moral distress
  - c. racism, hate incidents, and identity-based targeting
2. Recommendations and resources for culturally responsive, trauma informed, and anti-racist care
3. Guidance on avoiding re-traumatization or politicized harm

Resources for academic institutions or professional organizations on safeguarding psychologists from retaliation or censorship related to advocacy. Documents would include:

1. Clarification on psychologist's ethical rights to engage in:
  - a. Non-violent political speech
  - b. Public scholarship and advocacy
  - c. Human rights-based critique of government action
2. Distinguishing between hate speech and protected, rights-based expression

Create a Psychological First Aid for community and professional use. Adapted from WHO and other humanitarian partners, similarly, APA could create brief, downloadable handouts that:

1. Offer grounding techniques for emotion regulation and distress tolerance
2. Resources and contact information for peer support to manage distress

3. Resources and contact information of psychologists, trainees, educators or community leaders facing harassment, threats, or professional intimidation

Establish a monitoring and documentation mechanism by:

1. Collecting voluntary, confidential data from members on experiences of censorship, retaliation, or discrimination related to human rights advocacy by tracking:
  - a. Types of incidents
  - b. Settings (academic, clinical, organizational)
  - c. Outcomes and institutional responses

**Data Needs/Supporting Data:** Data to justify the need for this item are provided below along with suggestions for additional data collection.

### Existing Supporting Data

- Hate-motivated violence, including antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism, is associated with increased trauma symptoms and diminished community trust (Byers & Jones, 2020).
- Documented increases in antisemitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian hate incidents since October 2023 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024).
- Adverse psychological consequences of hate-motivated violence and exposure to armed conflict (Hobfoll et al., 2011; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).
- Evidence linking protection of free expression to psychological safety, resilience, and community cohesion (Verkuyten et al., 2019).
- Examples of APA policy application (American Psychological Association, 2022) demonstrating effective translation of policy into action.
- Humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (n.d.), documents extensive civilian harm and displacement in the current Middle East crisis.

### Potential Additional Data Needs for Implementation

- APA member feedback on experiences of suppression, retaliation, or discrimination related to public scholarship or advocacy regarding issues related to antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism.
- Outcomes from collaborations with other psychological associations or coalitions, including the number of joint statements issued and audiences reached.

**Data Needs/Supporting Data:** Specify what data exists or needs to be collected to support the need for this business item. In addition, specify what data is needed to assess outcomes or impact of the business item.

### **Diversity Impact:**

The psychological effects of war trauma are also not only intense but also intergenerational in terms of their impact on individuals, families, and communities (Lin & Suyemoto, 2016; Bezo & Maggi, 2015). Additionally, racism and discrimination are a public health issue as they have deleterious effects on both physical and mental health (Cobbinah & Lewis, 2018). This motion protects multiple communities currently facing heightened bigotry and war trauma including Jewish individuals, Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians.

### **Main Motion:**

We request that APA Council votes for APA to adopt the following statement:

### **Reaffirming APA's Commitment to Human Rights and Freedom of Expression:**

The American Psychological Association “stands for human rights and the psychological and physical health and well-being of all people worldwide” (American Psychological Association, 2021) and encourages members of our profession “to support and advocate for populations at risk of human rights violations, including marginalized populations both domestically and globally” (American Psychological Association, 2021). In light of the escalating trauma and suffering caused by the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, the APA’s Council of Representatives accordingly resolves to affirm the following principles:

- 1. APA affirms, consistent with APA's mission to “to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives,” our global commitment to human rights and freedom of expression as universal principles, applicable to all people regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, or immigration status.**
- 2. APA affirms, consistent with the final report of the APA Task Force on Human Rights, that “on the topic of human rights concerns, especially in the case of severe human rights abuses with clear relevance to psychology” (American Psychological Association, 2021), it is appropriate for APA to engage in advocacy with its own government and to enter into international dialogue through its partnerships with psychology organizations in different countries, or with coalitions of organizations who have the authority to speak with governments.**

### **Diversity Impact:**

Consider the positive, negative or neutral impact of the motion for marginalized populations and provide a rationale of the basis of the assessment.

**Main Motion:** Describe in succinct language what you are asking for. If requesting the formation of a task force or committee, specify its charge, size and expected duration. If requesting an amendment to the Association Rules or Bylaws, provide the current language and bracket material to be deleted and underline material to be added.

3. **APA reiterates, consistent with our 2024 policy reaffirming APA's commitment to human rights and free expression**, our call for an immediate cessation of violence, for emergency aid to the most vulnerable communities, and for the protection of all civilians in Israel and Palestine (American Psychological Association, 2024).
4. **APA condemns, consistent with our opposition to bigotry in all its forms** (American Psychological Association, 2021), antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism, along with all forms of discrimination, prejudice, hostility, and violence.
5. **APA rejects, consistent with our recognition that the free exchange of ideas is essential to science, human welfare, and the just resolution of conflict** (American Psychological Association, 2021), the claim that criticism of any government's policies or actions is intrinsically racist, antisemitic, or anti-Muslim. We therefore oppose efforts aimed at silencing or punishing non-violent advocacy directed towards safeguarding human life and upholding human dignity and human rights. We call for APA to commit to transparency and accountability by publicly documenting progress on its human rights efforts by developing guidance to academic, professional, and licensing bodies on safeguarding psychologists' rights to engage in non-violent political speech without professional retaliation.

*Through these commitments, APA reaffirms its role as a global leader in advancing psychology in the service of human rights and freedom of expression.*

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### Expected Outcomes/Products:

The statement will be published on APA's website and disseminated through APA Communications. APA will produce resources and guidance for psychologists and community members to deal with the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Middle East as well as the rise of antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Palestinian racism.

To ensure that this reaffirmation is operationalized beyond a symbolic statement, APA will embed these commitments within its ongoing education, advocacy, and partnership activities, including collaboration with international psychological associations, humanitarian mental health organizations, and human rights-focused professional coalitions; dissemination through APA divisions and state psychological associations; and periodic review and public documentation of related APA efforts, consistent with existing APA policy and practice.

**Expected Outcomes/Products:**  
Define the expected outcome or product if the main motion is approved.

### APA STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (APPROVED BY COUNCIL FEBRUARY 2024)

Utilize psychological science to make a positive impact on critical societal issues.	Elevate the public's understanding, appreciation and utilization of psychology.
Prepare the field of psychology for current and future opportunities and challenges.	Strengthen APA's role as a leading voice for psychology.

Please explain how this new business item advances one or more of the above strategic priorities\*:

**This new business item advances the strategic priorities to *Utilize psychological science to make a positive impact on critical societal issues* and *Strengthen APA's role as a leading voice for psychology* by re-affirming our commitment to human rights and ensuring that APA is taking actions to enact these policies.**

\*Please keep in mind the guiding and operating principles which can be found at <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/strategic-plan>.

### GUIDELINES FOR COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS

These guidelines apply to all resolutions submitted to Council for consideration. The following information must be provided: (1) The purpose and rationale for the resolution stated clearly, and documenting its relevance to psychology or psychologists; (2) The issue's importance to psychology or to

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society as a whole; (3) Representative scientific or empirical findings related to the resolution; (4) The extent to which the resolution is consistent with APA's guiding principles, and the extent to which it addresses human rights, health and welfare, and ethics; (5) The likelihood of the resolution having a constructive impact on public opinion or policy.

Resolutions approved by Council are understood to reflect what APA values or believes and, in most cases, does not commit APA to any action. If approval of the resolution requires that specific action be taken, the following information must also be provided: (6) Suggestions on how it should be implemented, if it is passed; (7) Breakdown of staff resources or association funds needed to implement the resolution.

### DESIGNATE COSIGNER(S):

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