

March 29, 2024

In Response to AASECT's Letter of Commitment to Justice, Equity, and Well-Being

To the esteemed members of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) Board of Directors (BOD),

We, a collective of deeply concerned AASECT members, are writing to express our profound disappointment and frustration with the recent communications from AASECT regarding the issues of harassment and discrimination within our community.

Additional steps must be taken to address the harms that have resulted from a combination of prolonged inaction by the BOD, disparate support for impacted communities within AASECT membership, and unbalanced enforcement of listserv guidelines.

Identity and ideology

While we recognize the importance of combating all forms of discrimination, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, it's crucial to differentiate between legitimate criticism of political ideologies and actual hate speech.

The conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism is not only misleading but also silences valid political discourse and dilutes the actual definition of antisemitism.

Many of us, including many Jewish members, hold anti-Zionist views and reject the notion that criticizing Zionism is inherently antisemitic. Entertaining this false equivalency has been shown to do more harm than good, ultimately harming the very populations it alleges to protect.

Similarly, the characterization of anti-Arab comments as Islamophobic oversimplifies the complex dynamics of discrimination against Arab communities.

We feel compelled to express our discomfort with what appears to be AASECT aligning itself closely with Zionism. Furthermore, we question the lack of acknowledgment of the ongoing genocide in Palestine. Recognizing the need for a ceasefire is more than a humanitarian imperative — it's a reflection of our organization's commitment to promoting peace and justice.

Intersectionality

The current harms experienced within the organization do not exist in isolation. To discuss American Jewish pain and suffering is to discuss American Arab pain and suffering. To discuss Israeli pain and suffering is to discuss Palestinian pain and suffering.

To ignore that these harms are intertwined is to deny the reality of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Our pain is tied together, and so is our liberation.

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The erasure of this issue highlights a broader pattern of neglecting and silencing marginalized voices both within AASECT and in the communities that we serve.

As an American entity that educates and amplifies voices of sexuality educators, counselors, and therapists, we must examine how our work affects marginalized and oppressed voices in the Global South and scrutinize our role in perpetuating colonialism.

Queer communities, women, and folks with diverse gender expressions and sexual experiences exist worldwide, and it's essential that our efforts to promote sexual liberation do not inadvertently reinforce Western imperialism.

When starving and bombing millions of people is rationalized as a means of "liberating" queer communities, women, and other marginalized groups, we perpetuate beliefs that sexual liberation is an imperial, Western concept. Such groups are subsequently tasked with proving to their local communities that these rights are not Western impositions but essential, inalienable freedoms.

To put it simply, AASECT has the responsibility to confront its own bias as an American organization when addressing international issues.

Impact of inaction

Despite numerous reports of harassment on the listserv, including personal attacks and derogatory remarks, there has been a glaring lack of acknowledgement and meaningful action from AASECT.

This failure to address such behavior has left many of us feeling disenfranchised and questioning the ethics of the organization and our professional community.

Additionally, we are deeply troubled by the dissemination of sociopolitical propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation within an unregulated and, ultimately, unrelated forum.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Allowing multiple posts unrelated to sexuality education, counseling, and/or therapy to publish and remain on the listserv despite being in clear violation of the then-current listserv guidelines regarding politics and harassment
- Allowing AASECT members who engaged in targeted harassment — at times bordering on hate speech — to offer politically motivated webinars for CE credit and promote them on the listserv

Such actions not only violate the terms of the AASECT listserv's working agreement at the time of posting but also undermine the integrity of our professional community.

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Accountability

In light of these concerns, we call on AASECT to begin by taking immediate and decisive action to address the issues of harassment, discrimination, and erasure of Pro-Palestinian and other liberation-based perspectives within our community.

This includes, but it not limited to:

- Providing clear guidelines for what constitutes approved and unapproved political speech on the listserv
- Providing clear guidelines for what constitutes bullying and harassment on the listserv
- Maintaining active, engaged listserv moderation, with transparent communication around what posts are not published and why, as well as what posts are removed and why
- Updating the organization's Resources for Collective Care to reflect a balanced distribution of demographic-specific resources — many of us have emailed suggestions, as requested, that have yet to be added
- Committing to a timeline — no sooner than 8 weeks but no later than 24 weeks — for reevaluating what sociopolitical resources, trainings, and other materials are endorsed or approved by AASECT, identifying areas of bias, and drafting a plan for equity and alignment moving forward

We are committed to working with AASECT to create a more inclusive and equitable community for all members. We hope that AASECT will take this opportunity to truly reaffirm its commitment to justice, equity, and well-being for all.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

Anonymous CSE, CST, and CSC who are on AASECT committees and concerned their name on this letter opens them to harm and removal from committees

Molly Adler, LCSW, CST, queer, anti-Zionist Jew, member of AASECT DEI and Awards committees

Rebecca Alvarez, LCSW, MEd, CST mixed race latine + white, anti-Zionist BIJOCSM Jew, queer non-binary therapist and educator

Fariba Arabghani, BA, ABS (she/her), queer, BIPOC, disabled, neurodivergent, first-generation Iranian-immigrant, educator, writer, DEIB, marketing and business consultant. To connect: lilithfoxx.com

Tess Catlett, writer, editor, and queer sex educator

Mariah Caudillo, Latine, queer sex educator, digital learning designer and content creator

Adam Clevenger, LPCC-S, CST, CSTS

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Damon Constantinides, PhD, LCSW, CST, queer and trans therapist and educator, author *Sex Therapy with Erotically Marginalized Clients*, planning committee member for AASECT Institute *Cultivate Trans Thriving*

Jeremy J. Darling, LMHC/LCPC, CST

Melina Gioconda Davis, queer sexuality educator and PhD student

Emily Durand (they/she), CHSE, queer, nonbinary, disabled, and immunocompromised violence preventionist and sex educator

Lucie Fielding, PhD, LPC, LMHC (she/they) queer, trans, leatherdyke, anti-Zionist Jewish therapist, sex and kink educator, and author of *Trans Sex* (awardee of the 2022 AASECT Book Award for Sexuality Professionals)

Wardeh Hattab, LCSW-R, CST, queer Arab femme

Abigail Hust, LISW-S, CST

Kimberly Jackson, LCSW, CST, CST-S, White, cis, femme; member of the AASECT DEI and Finance committees

Shanna Katz Kattari, PhD, MEd, CSE, queer nonbinary anti-Zionist Jew

Carrie/Cherry Kaufman, disabled, anti-Zionist Jewish sex educator and artist

Emma Kupferman, LICSW, LCSW-C, CST, CPT, anti-Zionist secular Jew

Bianca I Laureano, PhD, MA, CSE, CSES, queer LatiNegra WOCSHN co-foundress, reproductive justice activist, certified sex educator and supervisor displaced from Borikén

Caitlin Long, M.Ed., CSE queer nonbinary sexuality educator, co-founder re|scripted

Danica Mitchell, LCSW, mixed-race Native American sex therapist

Christine Montero, MSW, CSE, queer latina social worker & sex educator

Remi Newman, MA, sexuality educator, writer and surrogate partner, AASECT member since 2007, anti-Zionist secular Jew

Laura Potel, LCAT, queer anti-Zionist Jew

Shaina Singh, LCSW-S, CST (QWOC, 1.5-gen immigrant, intersectional feminist, social justice activist, and speaker). Shaina is available for professional consultations on anti-racism, decolonizing sexual health, and liberation work. To connect: fiveonewocounseling.com

Jared Smith-Valentine, LPCC-S, CST

S. Marissa Stein, MS, LMHC, CSY, NCC, (they/them), queer, trans, non-binary (agender), actively doing decolonizing and liberation work on self and in career as an LMHC and CST

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Shanéa Thomas, EdD, LICSW, CSE

Jason Villarín, PhD, DPT, FAAOMPT

Laura C. Westmoreland, LMFT, CST, and white/cis/het/decolonial feminist (AASECT membership renewal pending. I will not knowingly give money to institutions or organizations who seemingly align with and/or amplify Zionist propaganda. I am willing to lose my certification over this matter.)

Connor Williams, LCSW, queer sex therapist

Scotney Young, MSW, CSE

Colby Agostinelli, LMFT, CST (CST-S application pending - currently not motivated to continue) Identities: white, non-binary/trans, queer, neurodivergent, kinky, non monogamous, sex therapist, AAMFT approved supervisor mentor, graduate professor, owner of a group practice that employs sex therapists in training - phillycouplesandsextherapy.com

Terms to Know

Establishing a working definition of these terms ensures that all parties are speaking the same language and are able to engage in a more informed and constructive dialogue.

This can help to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and can ultimately lead to a more productive discussion of the issues at hand.

Palestine

“In principle, the Mandate was meant to be in the nature of a transitory phase until Palestine attained the status of a fully independent nation, a status provisionally recognized in the League’s Covenant, but in fact the Mandate’s historical evolution did not result in the emergence of Palestine as an independent nation. During the period of the Mandate, the Zionist Organization worked to secure the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The indigenous people of Palestine, whose forefathers had inhabited the land for virtually the two preceding millennia felt this design to be a violation of their natural and inalienable rights. They also viewed it as an infringement of assurances of independence given by the Allied Powers to Arab leaders in return for their support during the war. The result was mounting resistance to the Mandate by Palestinian Arabs, followed by resort to violence by the Jewish community as the Second World War drew to a close.”¹

Israel

“After investigating various alternatives the United Nations proposed the partitioning of Palestine into two independent States, one Palestinian Arab and the other Jewish, with Jerusalem internationalized. The partition plan did not bring peace to Palestine, and the prevailing violence spread into a Middle East war halted only by United Nations action. One of the two States envisaged in the partition plan proclaimed its independence as Israel and, in a series of successive wars, its territorial control expanded to occupy all of Palestine. The Palestinian Arab State envisaged in the partition plan never appeared on the world’s map and, over the following 30 years, the Palestinian people have struggled for their lost rights.”²

¹ United Nations. (n.d.). *Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem: 1917-1947 (Part I)*. The Question of Palestine.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/part-i-1917-1947/>

² United Nations. (n.d.). *Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem: 1917-1947 (Part I)*. The Question of Palestine.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/part-i-1917-1947/>

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Pro-Palestine

“Protests are categorized as pro-Palestinian when the messaging supports the Palestinian governments and its civilians, or condemns the Israeli government's actions in Gaza and settlements in the West Bank.”³

Pro-Israel

“Protests are categorized as pro-Israel when the messaging supports Israeli civilians targeted by Hamas, supports the Israeli government's operations in Gaza, or condemns the Hamas attack.”⁴

Antisemitism

“Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).”⁵

Zionism

“An international movement originally for the establishment of a Jewish national or religious community in Palestine and later for the support of modern Israel.”⁶

Anti-Zionism

“Opposition to the establishment or support of the state of Israel.”⁷

Genocide

“Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”⁸

³ Mukherjee, R., & Gordon, S. (2023, December 9). *Pro-Palestinian protests on the rise across the U.S.* Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2023/12/09/palestinian-protests-us-israel-gaza-war>

⁴ Mukherjee, R., & Gordon, S. (2023, December 9). *Pro-Palestinian protests on the rise across the U.S.* Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2023/12/09/palestinian-protests-us-israel-gaza-war>

⁵ The Jerusalem Declaration On Antisemitism. (2021, March 25). <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>

⁶ *Zionism*. Merriam-Webster. (2024b, February 28). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Zionism>

⁷ *anti-Zionism*. Merriam-Webster. (2024a, February 8). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-Zionism>

⁸ United Nations. (n.d.). *Genocide*. Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

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Islamophobia

“Islamophobia is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, it targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim.”⁹

⁹ United Nations. (n.d.). International Day to Combat Islamophobia 15 March.
<https://www.un.org/en/observances/anti-islamophobia-day>