

In response to the “AAS officers” statement regarding the Pakistani ban at AAS in India.

Over the past several days, scholars from a broad range of political and social spectra have spoken out in protest after learning that the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) was complicit in the Indian government’s exclusion of Pakistani nationals and individuals of Pakistani descent from an AAS-in-Asia conference to be held at Ashoka University in July. On June 11, the Association issued an unsigned statement from “AAS Officers on the 2018 AAS-in-Asia Conference.”

To our knowledge, a group of over 600 South Asian scholars signed a letter condemning the AAS for its decision-making and participating in the Government of India’s anti-Pakistani ban (which translates, in effect, into an anti-Muslim ban); a boycott letter is now making the rounds and garnering widespread support; individuals and smaller collectives have written expressing their dismay and lack of confidence in this set of AAS officers to do the right thing.

The statement issued by the unnamed AAS Officers responded to dissenting AAS members by simply reiterating the practical decisions the leadership made. The response noted, correctly, that there are almost no “politically uncomplicated countr[ies]” in Asia, but then went on to suggest that scholars who were critical of those decisions lacked an understanding of real-world challenges constraining international scholarly collaboration. The response concluded with the pronouncement that “fostering intellectual exchange . . . will involve compromises rather than stances of absolute moral purity.”

Why would the AAS officers—who we can assume to be the president and president-in-waiting, among others—dismiss political dissent in this non-dialogic way? We regret this dismissal of a principled political difference. Far from advocating anything pure or absolute, AAS members who disagree with AAS Officers are registering a vocal protest against the GOI’s *a priori* violation of freedom of scholarly exchange through the restrictions they are enforcing on Pakistani scholars (nationals and descent); we are protesting the corresponding lack of a strong moral or political stance on this issue under the current leadership of AAS, as the scholarly organization in which we are members. AAS is appropriately the target of our protest as AAS is the organization that ostensibly represents its members to the world.

As scholars, one of our *métiers* is to be vigilant of state-sponsored oppressions and to challenge them. Indeed, in February 2017, the AAS itself posted a statement, signed personally by then-president Laurel Kendall on behalf of the AAS Board of Directors, “strongly opposing” the Trump Administration’s Executive Order banning citizens of several preeminently Muslim nations. This precedent shows that AAS elected representatives CAN and DID express criticism of “politically complicated” countries and that they have done so in their own names. As we—and AAS as an organization—oppose the Muslim ban in the United States, so must we oppose the India ban on Pakistani scholars in India. Yet, a decision to the contrary was taken by AAS Officers in the name of its membership, without our permission, and without even consulting us.

We, the undersigned, all members of the Association for Asian Studies request an open and public accounting of how this AAS-in-Asia conference was planned, whether and/or why the leadership of the AAS was unaware of the GOI's discriminatory policy—which was very well known to Indian scholars. We must know how the Association determined actions they would take in response to the ban and why it took the Officers five months to publicly acknowledge the effect the ban would have on the Ashoka conference. We understand that a generic letter was posted in March on the AAS website; but members were not notified of the matter. To claim otherwise is administrative double-talk. The accounting we insist on having cannot happen in the form of a one-sided letter, which reiterates past decisions. Instead, it should be a live, two-way dialogue in which leadership and members discuss processes, decisions, and plans for this specific case as well as for the larger “AAS-in-Asia” project.

Towards the end of building trust, we require that this letter, along with all other letters sent to AAS—pro and con—be sent by direct email to all AAS members, and that all letters pro and con be posted on the AAS website. Further, we recommend that at the March 2019 Denver meeting, significant time be set aside for a public two-way dialogue that is transparent, civil, and productive.

positions collective

Charles Armstrong (Columbia University)
Sandeep Banerjee (McGill University)
Tani Barlow (Rice University)
Shelley Chan (University of Wisconsin)
Tina Mai Chen (University of Manitoba)
Deirdre de la Cruz (University of Michigan)
Arnika Fuhrmann (Cornell University)
Yukiko Hanawa (New York University)
Katsuya Hirano (University of California, Los Angeles)
Marilyn Ivy (Columbia University)
Andrew Jones (University of California, Berkeley)
Kang Wenqing (Cleveland State University)
Rebecca Karl (New York University)
Yukiko Koga (Hunter College)
Thomas Lamarre (McGill University)
Fabio Lanza (University of Arizona)
Christopher Lupke (University of Alberta)
Boreth Ly (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Rudolf Mrázek (University of Michigan)
Mimi Thi Nguyen (University of Illinois)
Alessandro Russo (University of Bologna)
Naoki Sakai (Cornell University)
Aminda Smith (Michigan State University)

Patricia Spyer (Graduate Institute, Geneva)
Robert Stolz (University of Virginia)
Gavin Walker (McGill University)
John Treat (Yale University)
Jing Wang (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
Angela Zito (New York University)

Signatories in support

Jonathan E. Abel (Penn State University)
Chong Eun Ahn (Central Washington University)
David Ambaras (North Carolina State University)
Jeffrey Angles (Western Michigan University)
Noriko Aso (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Jakobina Bina Arch (Whitman College)
Reiko Abe Auestad (University of Oslo)
Andrew Bernstein (Lewis & Clark College)
Chris Berry (King's College)
Davinder Bhowmik (University of Washington)
Shampa Biswas (Whitman College)
Cynthia J. Bogel (Kyushu University)
Stefania Burk (University of British Columbia)
Corey Byrnes (Northwestern University)
Shelley Chan (University of Wisconsin)
Jack Chen (University of Virginia)
Howard Chiang (University of California, Davis)
Heekyoung Cho (University of Washington)
Maggie Clinton (Middlebury College)
Ryan Cook (Emory University)
Rebecca Copeland (Washington University)
Brett de Bary (Cornell University)
Alexander Day (Occidental College)
Brian DeMare (Tulane University)
Purnima Dhavan (University of Washington)
Brian Dott (Whitman College)
Alexis Dudden (University of Connecticut)
Penny Edwards (University of California, Berkeley)
Harriet Evans (University of Westminster)
Charles Exley (University of Pittsburgh)
Norma Field (University of Chicago)
Magnus Fiskesjo (Cornell University)
Kathy Foley (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Jim Fujii (University of California, Irvine)
Bruce Fulton (University of British Columbia)
William Gardner (Swarthmore College)

Christoph Giebel (University of Washington)
Zev Handel (University of Washington)
Walter Hatch (Colby College)
Todd Henry (University of California, San Diego)
Christian Hess (Sophia University)
Jon Holt (Portland State University)
Chie Ikeya (Rutgers University)
Paola Iovene (University of Chicago)
Seth Jacobowitz (Yale University)
Jeffrey Johnson (Daito Bunka University)
Dredge Kang (University of California, San Diego)
Charles Kim (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
C. Harrison Kim (University of Hawaii)
Suzy Kim (Rutgers University)
Judd Kinzley (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
Lucas Klein (University of Hong Kong)
Christian Lammerts (Rutgers University)
Ashton Lazarus (Kyushu University)
Andrew Leong (University of California, Berkeley)
Samuel Liang (Utah Valley University)
Chun Lin (London School of Economics)
Wolfgang Linser (Harvard Institute for International Development)
Ralph Litzinger (Duke University)
Margherita Long (University of California, Irvine)
William Marotti (University of California, Los Angeles)
Christine Marran (University of Minnesota)
Johan Mathew (Rutgers University)
Wendy Matsumura (University of California, San Diego)
Covell Meyskens (Naval Postgraduate School)
Owen Miller (SOAS, University of London)
Arthur Mitchell (Macalester College)
Yajun Mo (Boston College)
Aaron Moore (University of Edinburgh)
Ruth Mostern (University of Pittsburgh)
Viren Murthy (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
Karen Nakamura (University of California, Berkeley)
Carla Nappi (University of Pittsburgh)
Rebecca Nedostup (Brown University)
Anjali Nerlekar (Rutgers University)
James Orr (Bucknell University)
Ravi Palat (Binghamton University)
David Palumbo-Liu (Stanford University)
Cody Poulton (University of Victoria)
Vince Rafael (University of Washington)
Lisa Rofel (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Zachary Scarlett (Butler University)

Sachi Schmidt-Hori (Dartmouth College)
Laurie Sears (University of Washington)
Mariko Shigeta Schimmel (Grinnell College)
Yukiko Shigeto (Whitman College)
Marc Steinberg (Concordia University)
Samhita Sunya (University of Virginia)
Bruce Suttmeier (Lewis & Clark College)
Jeremy Tai (McGill University)
Stefan Tanaka (University of California, San Diego)
Brij Tankha (University of Delhi)
Kate E. Taylor-Jones (University of Sheffield)
Christophe Thouny (Kyushu University)
Margaret Tillman (Purdue University)
Grace Ting (Oberlin College)
Anna Tsing (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Jonathan Walters (Whitman College)
Lingzhen Wang (Brown University)
Mengqi Wang (University of Michigan-Dearborn)
Dennis Washburn (Dartmouth College)
Rob Wilson (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Lorraine Wong (University of Otago)
Wasana Wongsurawat (Chulalongkorn University)
Naoki Yamamoto (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Kerim Yasar (University of Southern California)
Mimi Yiengpruksawan (Yale University)
Angela Yiu (Sophia University)
Victoria Young (University of Cambridge)
Paola Zamperini (Northwestern University)
Qian Zhu (Duke Kunshan University)
Jerry Zee (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Eve Zimmerman (Wellesley College)
Jonathan Zwicker (University of California, Berkeley)