



# **SABA North America's Statement Regarding Recent Violence in the Middle East and Rising Anti-Semitic and Anti-Islamic Speech and Violence**

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The conflict in the Middle East has a deep, centuries-long historical context, and no simple statement—much less one from an affinity bar organization in North America—can hope to address that full context or speak to the conflict with authority. Nevertheless, with present-day actions leading to rising incidences of antisemitic and anti-Islamic hate speech and violence across the United States and Canada, as well as the fallout faced by many Muslims, Jews and allies for expressing their political views or standing up for the rights of others, SABA North America can no longer be silent.

SABA North America was born in the aftermath of the U.S. terrorist attacks of 9/11, when South Asians of all faiths—certainly, Muslims, but also Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and many others—faced discrimination and violence from being wrongfully associated with the actions of terrorist extremists. Many of our members are Muslims, who are once again experiencing hate crimes, hate speech and harassment. And many of our strongest sponsors and closest allies are Jewish and are reeling from the October 7th attacks, the historical trauma it invokes, and escalating hate crimes and speech.

We are deeply concerned with the rise of attacks in the United States against those of both Jewish descent and Muslim descent, which have been fueled by bigotry and overheated rhetoric from those pushing extremist views. In Chicago, a landlord murdered a six-year-old boy and stabbed his mother more than two dozen times just for being Muslim and Palestinian-American. In New York, three Jewish men were shot at with a BB gun. And these are just a couple of horrific examples. We saw a similar rise in bigotry against the South Asian community after 9/11. We saw a similar rise in bigotry against Asian Americans after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. And now we see it once more.

Generations of SABA leadership forged this organization by fighting hard for the principle that we should not be divided by our differences in religion, region, gender or caste. Their courage is why we are not just the Indian American Bar Association, the Pakistani American Bar Association and dozens of other groups that might cater to splintered subsets of our membership.

In forging this unified organization, we took on as a core part of our mission the task of advancing our ideals of diversity, equity and inclusion across North America by supporting, protecting and defending the rights of everyone to speak and be heard in a manner that is respectful of those on the other side, acknowledges our shared humanity and recognizes that violence and discrimination are never appropriate responses to views with which we disagree.

Likewise, the suppression of legitimate political views undermines our fundamental desire to create an inclusive environment. It is often easy to brand those who hold different views from our own as coming from a place of bigotry and to seek to silence them or “cancel” them from our schools, our workplaces, and our organizations. But when those voices express a legitimate political view, we do ourselves a disservice by silencing them, firing them, or expelling them. And when we assume that everyone from a particular background believes a certain way—for example, that all Muslims must “celebrate” terrorist acts or that all Jews agree with Israel’s handling of the counteroffensive in Gaza—we prevent the very dialogue that could help find solutions to the problems in the Middle East and we artificially harden the divisions between groups here in North America. Most importantly, we blind ourselves to the humanity of the people on the other “side” and succumb to the illusion that there are only two sides to an issue and that we all cannot be on the same side.

At the same time, we reinforce the lesson that careless speech—not intentional hate speech, not even speech that was intended to offend—can still bring pain to the many people, including both Israeli and Palestinian, whose loved ones have been lost or harmed in this conflict. We urge everyone voicing their views on these issues to pay close attention to how their statements may be perceived, not just what they intended to convey.

SABA North America is here for anyone who needs support, and we ask that all in our community stand by our Muslim, Jewish, and Arab friends and family members and support them. Consistent with our mission, we will plan programming around allyship, bystander intervention, and civility in the legal field in the coming months.

We also ask legal employers and law schools to provide support for all members of their communities experiencing trauma right now. Many Jewish, Arab, and Muslim employees have reported feeling silenced or even suppressed at work for their political views. While they struggle to cope with the deeply personal nature of this conflict, they feel isolated from friends and colleagues. Employers and schools can help combat these feelings by acknowledging the pain experienced by multiple communities, lending support through employee assistance programs, and providing education and training on inclusive leadership. We can all play a role in supporting our colleagues.

Out of respect for the variety of political viewpoints of our members on the political questions in the Middle East, we will continue not to take a singular stance on those political issues. But SABA will continue to fight for the rights of our members and allies—regardless of their faith and ethnicity—to express those views respectfully. We will combat hate and discrimination against all groups, whether part of our membership or not. And SABA will always condemn in the strongest terms the brutal and reprehensible targeting or killing of innocent civilians, particularly children.