

President's Report November 2023, Board Meeting

Thanks to growing membership and the hard work and generosity of those members ASOR has been in a good place for the last decade and a half. My job as President in these annual reports to the Board as I have seen it has been to celebrate our successes, identify challenges, and explore ways to move forward on more fronts. Hence our **ASOR 2025—Strengthening Our Foundation | Expanding Horizons—A Call to Action** initiative featured in the Executive Director's report. I ended my 2022 report to you with "ASOR is healthy, financially and intellectually, and moving forward". That was and, in many ways still is true.

But there can be no celebration this year. The horrendous events of October 7 and the ensuing war between Hamas and Israel in Gaza have ripped much of the world in which we work apart and fueled growing fires of Islamophobia and antisemitism worldwide. We come together here in Chicago, many fewer than we would have been before the war, to try to begin to rebuild the bridges that have been damaged and to re-open lines of communication that have frayed or broken in the passions of war. It will be hard work and not accomplished in one meeting with a war still taking place.

The first step toward a road to reconciliation is to provide a safe place for civil discourse. Much of the work of ASOR's leadership, committees, and staff over the past month has been to ensure as best possible that the AM will be such a safe place this year. After consultation with the Hilton's very capable chief of security we have negotiated an enhanced, but we hope subtle, level of security for the meetings in cooperation with the CPD. We are reminding all presenters to respect our Annual Meeting Code of Conduct (approved in 2020), which calls for an "atmosphere of mutual respect, recognizing the diversity of ASOR membership and of those who participate in the conference". The session chairs are being asked to reiterate this at the beginning of each session, and the DEI committee has created a slide that will play at the beginning of each paper that highlights standards of good behavior (screen shot below). Since, because of the hybrid format of this year's program, we are running all the power points from ASOR laptops, we can locate and delete the few overtly political slides from presentations. The Program Committee is notifying the presenters in these rare instances of the deletions.

Finally, some people have asked Andy or me if they can make statements about the war. We have told them that the academic sessions are not an appropriate place to do this, but that we will accept brief statements in the questions portion of the members meeting on Friday. We have trimmed the agenda to make time for this.

In short, we have done everything we can think to do to promote a safe meeting at which civil discourse can take place. With a hot war in place and innocents dying daily that will be a big accomplishment. I hope we will go forward from Chicago with renewed faith that there is value in the study of the past. As Eric Meyers, one of our great past presidents tells us in his memoir, *An Accidental Archaeologist*, "Looking backwards to the past is a healthy way of looking to the future and an essential tool for understanding the present." Our present is complex and dark. We

are reeling from and heartbroken by the loss of lives in the regions where we work, not only by war, but also earthquakes, floods, and famine. It is hard to concentrate on “business as usual” at such a time. But a big part of our business is fostering collaborations and friendships across borders and between peoples. We will look to the future and carry on the good work.

