

ALEXANDRIA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2024
7:00 p.m., City Hall
301 King Street, Room 2000
The Chet and Sabra Avery Room

Members Present

Marc Bendick
Iulia Fratila
Matt Harris
Katherine O’Connell
Tom Reeder, Jr.
David Rigsby, Vice Chair
Sam Schwartz
Conrad Sylvanus (unofficial - Oath pending before City Clerk’s Office)
Jon Thompson

Staff Present

Anna McClure, Investigator
Miladis Martinez Gutierrez, Adm. Support

Members Excused

April Breslaw

Chair Lisl Brunner, Vice Chair Elisabeth "PJ" Palmer Johnson, Commissioner Susan Kellom, and Commissioner Megan Prince participated remotely by telephone.

Guests Speaker: Rabbi David Spinrad, Beth El Hebrew Congregation; Rabbi Steven I. Rein, Agudas Achim Congregation; and additional guests.

1. Call to Order/Introductions by Commissioner Matt Harris

Commissioner Harris called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes of the December Meeting

Upon a motion by Commissioner Thompson, seconded by Commissioner O’Connell, the Commission approved the minutes of the December meeting, All Commissioners present voted aye, and one abstained.

3. Guests: Rabbi David Spinrad, Beth El Hebrew Congregation; Rabbi Steven I. Rein Agudas Achim Congregation; and additional guests

Commissioner Harris welcomed all the guests and thanked them for being here tonight and said that the Commission's objective is to hear things of concerns that different groups and individuals have within the community. The Commission was joined by guest speakers Rabbi David Spinrad, Beth El Hebrew Congregation; Rabbi Steven I. Rein, Agudas Achim Congregation; and about ten additional guests.

Rabbi Spinrad started by thanking the Commission for the opportunity to present this evening. Rabbi Spinrad said, “We are Jewish Alexandrians, we are your neighbors, and our children go to school with your children”. He said that they are traumatized, and they often feel very alone right now.

He stated that one way that Jews differ from other people is that they are ethno-religious people, and they are somewhat of a nation where they live. Other religions can be separated and are often separated

by ethnic and national identity, Jews cannot. He said that there are about 15 million Jews in the world. There is a connection globally and their connections are deep, they are personal, familial, and they are deeply connected to Israel.

Rabbi Spinrad stated that, on October 7, 1,200 mostly Israeli civilians, almost every single one of them Jews, were murdered or executed by Hamas in a single most deathly massacre against Jews since the Holocaust. They were killed because they were Jews, 240 were kidnapped and 120 remain still in captivity, including women and children.

He said that they were here tonight to talk about the rise in antisemitism in this country and our cities. He said that they were here to give voice to the Holocaust distortion and the misinformation about the war between Israel and Hamas; this information bombards them and terrifies them every day. Rabbi Spinrad said that they were here to share personal experiences since October 7. They were here to tell what it has been like for them, for their family, and for this Jewish community in Alexandria since October 7. He asked that the Commission consider them as a resource and asks that Alexandria and the Alexandria Human Rights Commission combat antisemitism and Islamophobia in this City.

A young man shared his experience as a high school student at ACHS and stated that he has been in public schools since kindergarten. He stated that has never experienced antisemitism in schools. Then October 7th happened and following those events he started noticing small incidents, such as kids doing the heil Hitler sign in the hallways, and they also would make comments such as “six million was not enough,” but if he would call them out on it, then he was being too sensitive and would be told that it was just a joke.

A guest who is a preschool Director stated that her primary responsibility is the safety and well-being of about 50 children and a dozen teachers, which means every morning she checks for the latest update from the secure community network (SCN). SCN is the safety and security Organization for the Jewish Community in North America and they work with Synagogues, schools, and community centers. They coordinate with law enforcement agencies and report on antisemitic threats and incidents, such as vandalism, bomb threats, verbal attacks, and assaults. She said that before October 7th, she received 2 or 3 SCN emails a week. Since October 7th, she has received 2 or 3 a day. Since mid-October, they have been warned that lone offenders pose the greatest threat to their community right now; there has been a dramatic increase in physical assaults, bomb threats, and online calls for mass casualty attacks against Jews and Jewish organizations. She said that they are constantly reminded that while no direct credible threats have been identified at this time, this situation remains dynamic, and individuals may be motivated to action with little to no warning. She is a preschool director and in the middle of ordering art supplies, reading stories, and changing diapers. She stated that she worries about bombs, guns, and coordinated attacks, she worries that she will not be able to do her job, that she will not be able to keep everyone safe. She stated that antisemitic incidents are increasing, they have increased by 337% since October 7th. She stated that the Anti-Defamation League indicates that between October 7th and November 7th Jews in America experienced nearly 34 antisemitic incidents per day.

A guest who is originally from Israel and moved to the US when she was a child and has lived in Alexandria for about six years now, shared her experience as a Jewish parent in Alexandria and gave three examples of the types of decisions that Jewish parents are contemplating these dates about making

their Jewish identity public. First, there is a tradition during Hanukkah of putting a Menorah in the front window at their home, but she did not feel safe about it this year, and other parents feel the same way. At International Day at her daughter's school, parents felt uncomfortable hosting an Israel table. Many parents are also uncomfortable with their children wearing a necklace with the Star of David pendant. What she would hope for the community in Alexandria is thriving in an environment that is abundantly welcoming and safe.

A guest who has been a resident of Alexandria for 26 years. She explained that they have two Synagogues in Alexandria, Agudas Achim, which was formed in 1914, and Beth El congregation, which was formed in 1859. Agudas has about 1,000 people and when combined with members from Beth El, as well as Jews who are not affiliated as members with the Synagogue, that is at least several thousand Jewish Alexandrians, and yet despite being part of the fabric of Alexandria, they are still dealing with antisemitism, bomb threats, and other danger. In the past six years, annual expending on security went from zero dollars to hundreds of thousands. They have been dealing with how to emotionally process antisemitism since October 7. She said that she was asked whether anyone in their synagogue was impacted, and the answer is everyone in the synagogue has been impacted. They all have family and friends, or know someone close to someone who was killed, taken hostage, or otherwise impacted. She said that it has been extremely difficult as they have listened to statements by Hamas, that when they have the opportunity, they will launch yet another October 7-like attack, killing or eliminating every Israeli that is located between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean City. She expressed that Jewish Alexandrians are dealing with fear, trauma, and safety issues. She asked that this Commission focus on positive messages, outreach, and education to prevent Islamophobia and antisemitism.

A guest who has two kids in ACPS, one of whom in school the day of the walked out at ACHS, who made plans with one Jewish teacher so that there would be a safe place for kids to go should things get out of hands. It was a worrying day for all the Jewish students on campus. She read a statement in which she said that Jews are a marginalized group that is not considered credible to speak on their experience and pain or to define their discrimination or marginalization.

Rabbi David Spinrad shared how the October 7th Hamas attack is affecting American Jewish students and their experiences in ACPS. He stated that ACPS incorporates lessons of the Holocaust beginning in their 10th-grade curriculum and offers an AP class called "AP World History Modern" that covers significant historical events from 12,000 CE to the present. He said that Holocaust education requires a unique amount of support from adults in this community inside and outside the classrooms to help the Jewish teens of this City. Jewish students are reliving an intergenerational trauma during these lessons; they need help to combat antisemitism among their peers. He stated that a lot of Holocaust distortion happens on social media, ranging from blaming Jews for their demise during the Holocaust and claiming the Jewish people deserved the treatment perpetrated against them by the Nazis and denying that the Holocaust happened at all. Comments such as Hitler was right or, more recently, Hamas needed to finish the job. He expressed that social media platforms are doing very little to prevent posts with Holocaust distortion from going viral.

He stated that ACPS recognizes the importance and responsibilities that their students have to be mature responsible digital citizens, and there is a digital citizen curriculum that discusses internet safety, digital communication, and cyberbullying. He added that in Judaism they are taught that they are responsible

for the development of not only their children but for all of them; and as adults, they have a responsibility to be resources for them and guide them in understanding how to build strong and inclusive communities.

He stated that the Alexandria city government cannot influence the war between Israel and Hamas, but it can ensure that all the residents of the City feel safe in their day-to-day activities, prioritizing education, and including teachers, families, and resources specific to antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Another guest is a government and community relations director at a Jewish advocacy organization in Washington, DC. The organization has been advocating for human rights and social justice - they work to build bridges between communities and advance policies that protect the rights of marginalized people and support the Jewish community to fight antisemitism. She said that in recent years as incidents of antisemitism have increased, their emphasis on fighting antisemitism has grown. She stated that, since October 7, hatred of Jews has exploded, even before Israel began its military campaign to recover the hostages, which are still being held after 102 days of captivity. She stated that in our region, her organization has been fielding calls in every jurisdiction from students and families that feel unsafe in their schools, on their campuses, and online. They have also heard community leaders spreading the lie that the October 7 massacre did not happen, that it was a hoax and a fabrication. She said that they are sharing their stories and hope that it will help the Commission understand and protect their community, as they protect all Alexandrians.

Another shared the experience of her friend's son who was taken at gunpoint into Gaza on October 7; he has not been heard from in 102 days. 132 hostages remain in Gaza, including her friend's son. In addition to the hostages, nearly 5,500 Israelis were injured on October 7 and 1,200 were brutally murdered. She stated that Hamas is known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, which is a Sunni Islamist terrorist organization leading Gaza. It was founded in 1988 with two long-term goals, the first goal is to end the Jewish State, and the second is to create an Islamic State from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. She also talked about how, in 2020, the U.S. State Department reported that Iran had provided more than a hundred million dollars annually to Hamas. Iran has funded rockets and vehicles, and whatever other means Hamas has used to break through the borders into the Jewish State.

Another guest has lived in Alexandria for five and half years and is a member of a congregation. She stated that for the past 102 days she has been hurting. The Jewish people in Alexandria, Israel, and all over the world are hurting, grieving, and deeply traumatized. She added that her generational trauma has been reawakened since October 7; because of the massacre of Israeli civilians by Hamas and other Islamic terror groups has reenacted their trauma. The Jewish people are hurting, grieving, traumatized, and scared and at the same time, they are asked repeatedly to defend and justify themselves. She added they were told that Israel and the Jewish people got what they deserved on October 7th and that this violence is the only way to liberate the Palestinian people. She also stated that 132 women, men, and children are still being held hostage by an organization committed to the violence, and destruction of Israel and her people.

Rabbi Steven Rein shared the experience of a family that was in Gaza experiencing the sounds of war right in their backyard, gunshots firing into their living room. Fortunately, they were rescued, but many others were not so fortunate. He stated that Jewish Alexandrians and Palestinian Alexandrians are

hurting. He concluded by reading a poem from a mother of an American hostage, who is being held by Hamas.

Commissioner Harris thanked the speaker guests for their presentation, which was followed by questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Bendick asked if there are ways that they feel that the City should have responded, should now be responding in some other way, or more fully than they have, or are there deficiencies that the Commission can echo back to City Council or the Mayor?

Rabbi Rein stated that, especially at ACHS, there is opportunity for dialogue and bringing students together, engaging in dialogue of mutual understanding, so students are not yelling at each other.

Rabbi David Spinrad stated that he believes that the City has some potential to sit down at the table together, so anything that the City can do to encourage and facilitate a conversation is appreciated.

Commissioner Schwartz stated that it is in the Commission ordinance to prevent Islamophobia and antisemitism in Alexandria and asked for suggestions or successes for getting a positive message out.

A guest suggested a statement that encourages person-to-person connection. Some are very active in the organization called The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, which meets monthly to spend time together and form relationships. They are being uplifted by the extreme empathy they have seen in Alexandria between friends. It was also encouraged to have a statement from the Commission to the Superintendent of the schools acknowledging what the Commission heard tonight and in November, recognizing and calling it out as something that needs to be paid attention to and that the Commission sees as a problem, because she thinks that the schools are looking for guidance.

It was suggested to convince the Mayor to convene a group of Palestinians and Jewish Alexandrians.

Commissioner Harris stated that the Commission can do something like that, have a Town Hall.

Commissioner Harris stated that the Commission will work on getting a statement out and then hopefully convene some sort of forum with the community to bring folks from the Palestinian Muslim community and Jewish communities together.

Commissioner Thompson encouraged the guests to report incidents of hate or discrimination to the Office of Human Rights.

4. Executive Committee Meeting

Commissioner Harris stated that the Executive Committee met and discussed the Community Policing Review Board (CPRB). Investigator McClure stated that Chair Brunner had a meeting with Rob Krupicka and Kim Neal, the Police Independent Auditor, and they suggested that the Commission assign a liaison to go to their meetings and facilitate coordination with the Human Rights Commission.

Investigator McClure stated that the CPRB meets the first Wednesday of every month, at 7:00 p.m., in the Council Workroom. She asked anyone interested to let her or Chair Brunner know. Commissioner Harris stated that the Executive Committee suggested that Commissioner Shwartz be the liaison to the Community Policing Review Board. Investigator McClure also reported that Chair Brunner was told that the Memorandum of Understanding between the CPRB and the Police is expected to be finalized in

June. The MOU has been drafted and was presented at the January CPRB meeting, but still has to go to the police union for review, once the CPRB votes to approve it.

Commissioner Harris gave an update on the ARHA/APD issue involving the mask ban right around Halloween. Commissioner Thompson stated that the Commission asked the Police Department and ARHA to come to speak to the Executive Committee, but ARHA declined to do so. Investigator McClure stated that the ARHA CEO had a medical issue, which is why no one could attend. Commissioner Thompson proposed contacting ARHA again to ask them to come talk to the Commission, but if they still refuse, it might be in the best interest of the Commission to raise this with City Council, to let them know what the Commission has done to try and get ARHA to attend and their response. Commissioner Thompson volunteered to draft another letter to ARHA, requesting that the ARHA CEO, once she is healthy, come to the Commission, so that the Commission can be asked about their procedures and how they decide to send out notices to their tenants.

Commissioner Harris reported that at the February meeting, the Commission plans to have Erika Kleiner, the City's LGBTQ+ Task Force Coordinator, and will invite other guests to talk about transgender youth in public schools.

5. Old & New Business

Legislative Session Updates

Investigator McClure gave an update on the legislative session and said that she has been receiving bills for comment. She reported that there are a couple of constitutional amendments for marriage equality, and constitutional amendments to protect people's reproductive rights; there is also a bill trying to prohibit use of public funds to any group that provides abortion care services. She reported that of the number of bills that she has received, there are more bills that the Commission supports than opposes. She shared the area she is seeing proposed restrictions are election bills, which are proposing various ways of trying to restrict voting, whether limiting the dates for early voting, or limiting the ways people can drop off absentee ballots. There is also a bill to reinstate the death penalty; there are a couple of disability accessibility bills, and there are also bills on electronic participation in public meetings. She also reported that House Bill 758 and House Bill 604, prohibiting state and local governments from contracting with businesses that are boycotting business with Israel, have been referred to the committee, but nothing beyond that at the moment.

Monumental Potomac Yard Arena proposal engagement

Investigator McClure reported that AEDP and the City are holding another community engagement session and will let the commission know when she gets more information.

Last meeting follow-up items - City light displays

Investigator McClure reported that there is no policy for deciding when to light up City Hall, the City takes the requests as they come. The challenges for doing anything too specific is there is a Supreme Court decision around government speech that is what the resolution regarding light and flag displays, etc., is governed by, and they are hesitant to do anything other than what the resolution says. She stated that there is no written process, it is usually a City Department or Council who requests, but not sure if there is any process that is contained at the Council. Commissioner Harris suggested inviting the new City Attorney to come talk to the commission about this topic.

Commissioner O'Connell stated that four months since she first brought up the City Hall lights display the commission has had residents of the City come to the meetings to talk about the impact of the genocide on them here locally in Alexandria and the Commission asked for time to educate themselves, so over four months they have had formal speakers including tonight. She stated that at that time she brought up having the commission and the City pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire. She reported that since then 44 municipalities, including San Francisco have passed ceasefire resolutions, and 20 municipalities including the Human Rights Commission of Austin, and Richmond, Virginia have introduced them. She added that the City of Alexandria made a political statement about this conflict when it changed the lighting at City Hall and left them up for three weeks.

Commissioner O'Connell stated that she would like to formally move to vote on a ceasefire resolution today, and brought one that had been written, which acknowledges the pain of Israeli lives lost on October 7, and equally acknowledges the devastating loss of nearly 30,000 Palestinians. Commissioner Harris told Commissioner O'Connell that this item should have been put on the agenda and sent to Investigator McClure in advance to send to the Commission. Commissioner Palmer Johnson moved to put this item on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting. The Commission unanimously decided to table the discussion on the resolution for the next meeting.

Commissioner Harris stated that he attended the Outreach at ALIVE! Food Hub, on January 13, and said that it was a great experience. Commissioner Fratila volunteered to do the outreach at ALIVE on February 13, 2024.

Investigator McClure gave an office update and said that cases are up and also stated that case settlements and mediations are up too. She added that the office staff are actively training in getting the case management system up and running so that we can have better data and a better reporting system, and we are very close to launching. She also reported that the HR Director and Deputy City Manager hiring processes are underway. She also stated that she had just finished the Council of Government Equity cohort, which was a year long, and her group presented their project, which had to do with small business outreach.

6. Liaison Reports

Commissioner O'Connell reported that the Landlord and Tenant Relations Board meeting last month was very short and said that they had elections, so they have a new Chair, and she is elected Vice Chair.

Vice Chair Palmer Johnson announced that January is National Human Rights Trafficking Awareness Month and reported that the Mayor and City Council presented the Commission for Women with a proclamation declaring January National Human Trafficking Awareness Month. She announced the Commission for Women will be at four Metro stops during January and February distributing bookmarks with information about the Domestic Violence program.

Commissioner Reeder reported that the Commission on Aging is working very closely with ARHA on the Ladrey redevelopment proposal. He stated that ARHA does behave like a government entity, and the City Council approves their board members. He reported that they are focusing increasingly on the Monumental project and the effects on housing and transportation.

Investigator McClure reported that the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities heard from Amy Posner, the City's Electric Vehicle Planner, who spoke to them about accessibility around electric vehicle charging. She also reported that the ACPD formed a subcommittee to provide some sort of window decal for businesses certifying that they are accessible, but there are some challenges in doing that and the office is working with them on that.

Commissioner Schwartz reported that the Commission on HIV/AIDS did not meet in December, and the January meeting is on Monday. On February 3, they will hold a retreat to discuss long-term planning.

Public Comment

The Commission heard from several members of the public, who provided statements on the conflict between Palestine and Israel. Each member had three minutes to present their statement. The statements are attached to the minutes.

7. Announcements /Adjournment

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Thompson/Vice Chair Rigsby **PASSED** unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:51 p.m.

█ comments to the Alexandria Human Rights Commission, January 18, 2024

Gaza needs a permanent ceasefire. The United Nations have voted repeatedly for an immediate ceasefire to stop Israel's genocide.

There is no justification for genocide. Israel uses "defense" as a justification for ethnic cleansing and genocide. During the 1948 Nakba, Israel forced over 800,000 Palestinians from their homes and lands and destroyed over 500 towns and villages and then occupied those lands—which Israelis did not own. Under international law, Israel cannot claim defense in occupied territories.

Carpet bombing civilians is not defense; it is a war crime. Starving and denying water, medicine, shelter, electricity and fuel to civilians are war crimes. Targeting and killing journalists and healthcare professionals are war crimes. Bombing hospitals, aid convoys, schools, universities, refugee camps, homes, ambulances, bakeries, clinics, cemeteries, libraries, critical infrastructure, and historic sites are war crimes—and crimes against humanity. "The forced displacements in Gaza are genocidal.

Criticizing genocide and war crimes is not anti-Jewish. Protecting **all** human life is the **essence** of Judaism.

Hamas's October 7 attack in Israel was not targeted at "killing Jews because they are Jews." A Hamas spokesperson said "the group's military operation is in response to all the atrocities the Palestinians have faced over the decades" (75 years). Hamas wants "the international community to stop atrocities in Gaza, against Palestinian people," and the holy sites like the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Raz Segal, an Israeli-American Holocaust scholar called Israeli actions in Gaza "a textbook case of genocide." The International Court of Justice accepted South Africa's urgent genocide case against Israel because of Israel's "acts of killing Palestinians in Gaza, causing them serious bodily and mental harm, and inflicting on them conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction. Israel "has failed to prevent genocide and is committing genocide in manifest violation of the Genocide Convention..." Dr. King said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We cannot tolerate impunity in Gaza or anywhere else!

Thousands of Americans and Virginians have lost families and friends during Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza and the illegal Zionist settler attacks and pogroms in occupied Palestine. Americans do not want our taxes used for weapons to commit genocide or to sustain Israel's system of occupation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing.

Palestinians are human beings with human rights. We ask the Human Rights Commission to be on the right side of U.S. and international law, morality, and history. We ask you to uphold equal rights for all people. Please vote for the ceasefire resolution.

I share with you a Sufi proverb that helps me decide who to accept as friends and who to keep at bay:

“He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool; shun him.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a student; Teach him.

He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep; Wake him.

He who knows, and knows that he knows, is Wise; Follow him.”

Yesterday, we met a bit of everybody!!!

Thank you for your time yesterday- It was a long night and the committee was very gracious to stay and listen. I heard the word "safe" quite a bit, which to a Palestinian in Gaza (and even the West Bank) is the most one feeling they have not been allowed. The young man you met in November had experienced 5 wars in his 22 years. He has never felt safe. For the last 100 days, Palestinians are not safe in their hospitals, in their schools, in the first floors of their buildings or the 10th floors of their buildings. They are not safe in the safe zones, they are not safe in the streets, in their tents. Thirty thousand Gazans are dead in what is described as the most deadly war of the 21st century [Gaza Casualties](#) The disconnect was so intense, from those purporting to be humanists. I was so appalled at the celebration of Zionism. Zionism is why my mother lost her country, her home, her family business, her family cohesion, her peace of mind, her childhood. Zionism is why anxiety has trickled through the generations and kept us all feeling like we don't belong.

Below is my statement why need the City of Alexandria to ask for ceasefire:

1) This impacts me very personally. I have lost 5 family members early on in the war- My mother is [REDACTED] - the below are from her branch of the family. The family is one of the largest in Jerusalem. After being dispossessed in 1948- they fled to Gaza

They are [REDACTED] age 53, [REDACTED] age 29, [REDACTED], age 25, [REDACTED], age 20, [REDACTED], age 20 (twin brothers)

My aunt, [REDACTED] has also lost her grandchildren and her daughter, about 10 people died from the [REDACTED]. You can check the names on [List of Dead in Gaza](#)

2) Pro Palestinian Americans and especially Palestinian Americans are being silenced and we need the City of Alexandria to represent us and have our voices uplifted. We are being misrepresented and erased in the Virginia textbooks, [Erasure of Palestine from VA text books](#), we are being censored on social media platforms, we are being doxxed in the universities and smeared by the Canary Mission, [Canary Mission suppression of anti israel speech](#). On the state level and even federal level, the International Holocaust Resolution Alliance [IHRA](#) now makes it a near crime to speak up against Israel while it commits genocide. In short, we are abandoned on every level. I referred to [REDACTED] who was surprised that the holocaust was only taught as of 10th grade. He was misinformed. My sons attended Thomas Edison, the Holocaust is covered in English Lit classes, in Social Sciences classes and in History classes. It is suggested reading for the summer and it dominates as a topic. Palestinians, the victims of the victims, get no such attention. No other group gets the attention of the Holocaust (not even on Netflix lol). This is just a fact.

3) Muslim Americans, who are part of Alexandria's diverse community, want wars against their communities to end. We have seen US led wars in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Libya and Yemen decimate Muslim communities, destroy livelihoods and families, poison the land and be used as weapons testing

grounds. Muslim Americans are sick of seeing their countries of birth where they still have family being war labs for the US (with Israeli support). We are not the terrorists here- The casualties of this war are higher than those of the Ukraine with 9700 civilian deaths over 19 months, higher than the death toll of US soldiers in Korea, higher than the number of American black men killed by police in a 6 year period. And over 1/3 of Gazan dead are children. Where is the humanity of HR advocates when they stay silent. There are now 350K patients without medication. 1 bathroom for 500 people. Has not the Muslim world suffered enough at the hands of the US who claims to be a beacon of democracy. Has the US not satisfied its thirst for hatred and carnage against the Muslim communities. Some more dark comparisons, imagine a city where everyone has had their home destroyed by a US made bomb, who may have lost their entire family, Imagine one of our schools having every child killed and school blown to smithereens -- all the teachers killed too. And the men, fathers and brothers stripped naked in the cold like the Nazis did in Auschwitz- How do we stay silent when the images are clear as day? [images](#)

4) The war has spread and is now a regional war- for what , for Israel??? why?? Lebanon was attacked by Israel as was Syria, Yemen has retaliated in defense and Iraq is now attacking a US military base. 35 K US military personnel in MENA are on high alert. For who, for Israel???? why?? Over 60% of Americans want a ceasefire.

My mother, may she rest in peace, told me that she cursed the day we came to the US and more than ever, I understand why. The US wants me to hate my identity and my religion. I will not. The Mayor wants to celebrate Israel. I will not. It is a terrible thing to feel that you are always so devalued in a city and state and country that says it values human life but has no equal regard for its citizenry. US history is steeped in racism. It is the coldest, cruelest and most racist country I have lived in. Please vote for a Ceasefire. It is the least that can be done. It is the RIGHT thing to do.

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a Jewish-American anti-Zionist and Palestine solidarity activist. Like most American Jews, I was raised with Zionism, learning lies like Israel was “A land without a people for a people without a land.” It wasn’t until I traveled to the West Bank and Gaza over 25 years ago that I witnessed and learned firsthand from Palestinians about the 75 year history of dispossession, occupation, and apartheid perpetuated by Israel, funded by the United States. Nowadays, no one needs to travel to the region to bear witness. Israel’s 102-day genocide on the Palestinian people is streamed 24/7 on our phones. When I learned about the Holocaust and the words “never again” as a child I took it literally, to mean NEVER AGAIN—FOR ANYONE.

We live in a time when those who speak out for a ceasefire, those who criticize Israel’s genocidal acts, are tarred with the label of anti-Semite, or self hating Jew. This strategy is deployed to make people afraid and to have a chilling effect on free speech. We must all reject the cynical logic that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism, and we must be unafraid to do what is right.

Mayor Wilson claimed that what happens in Palestine is not the City’s business. He is WRONG. Palestinians living right here in Alexandria have loved ones in Gaza who have been killed and maimed by Israel during this genocide. Alexandria residents send \$2.7 million of their hard-earned tax dollars to Israel every year to fund occupation, ethnic cleansing, and murder, instead of housing, healthcare, and education. The City of Alexandria MADE Palestine its business when it lit up City Hall with the colors of Israel’s flag while ignoring the pain and suffering of the people of Gaza. Palestine IS the business of every person of conscience in this world.

It is our moral obligation as human beings to speak up and act now. I am asking the City of Alexandria to make repair for its one-sided actions and to issue a statement of sympathy with Palestinians. I also urge you to vote yes on the ceasefire resolution that was presented today.

We hear a lot about being on the right or wrong side of history, but Palestinians are not history. They are a living, breathing people, despite Israel’s efforts to dehumanize and eradicate them. They are narrating the horrors of this genocide every day, at great risk to themselves and their families. It is our collective, urgent responsibility to listen, and to call for an immediate end to this nightmare. Thank you.

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a lifelong Jewish resident. Here are my remarks you requested:

Hi, good evening. Thank you for your time tonight. I'm here tonight because I was disturbed by the mayor's response to our letter; specifically by how he said that Alexandria City Council is "not in the business of weighing in on the conduct of international conflicts". As a Jew I know that Never Again is everybody's business.

It is the responsibility of every human being in the world to prevent genocide. And make no mistake, this is a genocide. As of the 100th day, 2 days ago, the UN reported that 24,100 people have been killed. Around 8 thousand more are missing. Let's not be naive. The "missing" are dead. Crushed under the rubble of their own homes. 60, 834 people are injured. Injured by American bombs, by American white phosphorous. Injured without adequate medical care due to the 16 year siege of the region. A siege that has escalated catastrophically in these last 3 months. Luxuries such as anesthesia have run out.

As a child I received just a few stitches in my right pinky toe without anesthesia, only 2 or 3. Keeping my body still enough for the procedure through the agony and mutilation I felt was one of the hardest things I have ever done. I suffer debilitating pains there to this day. In Gaza, over one thousand children have had to endure amputations of one or both legs without anesthesia. I can't begin to imagine my pain multiplied by a hundred, then by a thousand. Could you look any of these children in the eye and tell them their torment and their loss is no business of yours?

Over 1% of the population has been killed in a mere three months. One out every 20 people are either dead, injured, or missing. The infrastructure is being deliberately annihilated. 21 out of the 36 hospitals are inoperable. Over 60% of housing has been damaged or destroyed. 1.9 million people out of a population of just over 2 million have been displaced, made homeless. Hospitals, ambulances, maternity wards, mosques, churches, apartment buildings, local schools, UN schools, convenience stores, graveyards, roads, bakeries, farms, and designated safe zones have been bombed. Three Israeli citizens, shirtless and waving white flags, were shot to death by Israeli forces. IDF soldiers are gleefully recording themselves ransacking bombed out homes. None of this is an accident. None of this is self-defense. This is collective punishment. This is a genocide, an orchestrated apocalypse. How can we sit here from our first world comfort and say this is no business of ours? Voting for the Ceasefire Resolution is the bare minimum we can do as a community. The world has broken its promise of Never Again and we must do everything we can to repair it.

I would also recommend learning more about this issue that directly affects thousands of members of our community. Not a single Palestinian family in this community has been spared. Everyone has lost someone.

Journalists on the ground

- Motaz Azaiza
- Plestia Alaqad
- Bisan Owda
- Wael Al-Dahdouh

Films:

- Israelism
- Israel's Automated Occupation: Hebron
- Weaponising Water in Palestine
- Rebel Architecture: The architecture of violence

Books:

- The Holocaust Industry by Norman Finkelstein
- The Palestine Laboratory by Antony Loewenstein
- Salt Houses by Hala Alyan
- The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine by Ilan Pappé

Academics to follow:

- Noura Erakat (Palestinian Human Rights Lawyer)
- Norman Finkelstein (Jewish Political Scientist)

Hi, my name is [REDACTED]. I'm a resident and homeowner in Alexandria. I'm neither Jewish nor Muslim. I grew up in the Philippines. We had two Filipino hostages captured by Hamas. Thailand had over 50. France had six, Tanzania had two, Sri Lanka had one. The Philippines, Thailand, France, Tanzania, and Sri Lanka all voted for a ceasefire at the UN General Assembly.

This is a resolution for a ceasefire to save civilian lives both of hostages, Israeli and international, and Palestinians. What does it have to do with the Holocaust? How is calling to save Palestinian children anti semitic?

Alexandria can have Holocaust education, education against anti semitism in public school AND a ceasefire resolution. We can teach students that October 7 happened and still have a ceasefire to save the lives of the hostages and Palestinian civilians.

Alexandria can make a difference. We are a city right beside DC. We have residents who are members of Congress and Senate. Congressman Beyer has called for a ceasefire.

Twenty-five hostages have died from starvation and from Israeli air strikes. Alexandria, please call for a ceasefire. Save our hostages.

First off we need you to vote yes for a permanent ceasefire. As mentioned by [REDACTED], medical treatments are almost not available in Gaza now. My friend [REDACTED] is currently suffering from kidney failure and we have been trying to get him out of Gaza for the past 2 months with no luck. I have been contacting organizations, embassies and congressmen but it seemed like every route has been a rejection. As I see how hard it is for my friend to get any medical support, it made me feel extremely guilty knowing that when I needed medical attention I was able to go to the ER with no issues while [REDACTED] had to continue suffering ... During this continuous genocide his sister in law had to undergo a c-section with no anesthesia and the baby still hasn't been able to get his vaccines he is currently 2 months old. I have started to believe that human rights don't really exist in the USA especially when it's people who look like us or from our region we don't really get a fair chance. we have seen that the only people benefiting from human rights are a small demographic of people who are white westerners. The whole Gaza strip only has 6 functioning ambulances. Can you imagine how terrible that is? Our small cities have way more than that ... While we are here discussing if we should ask for a ceasefire the hospital complex Alnasser is being bombed.

January 16, 2024

Dear Alexandria, Virginia Human Rights Commissioners,

My name is [REDACTED] and I implore you to endorse the Ceasefire resolution immediately. This is a no-brainer; we are blessed with the opportunity to offer a very small Alexandrian gesture in light of the genocide in Gaza.

I am your 71 year-old neighbor, a scholar of Jewish and Israeli folklore with a PhD from [REDACTED]. As a Jew who lives among you, I broken-heartedly protest Israeli state disproportionate and vengeful retaliation against innocent Gazan civilians in response to the horrific October 7th Hamas attack on Israeli citizens. I was born shortly after my family was dragged from Rygllice, Poland and murdered in death camps by the Nazis. Israel's barbaric actions DO NOT keep me safe. My speaking out against Zionist policies is based on the moral teachings of my Jewish faith. I am not anti-Semitic.

It's January 16, 2024, and Dr. Martin Luther King's words are ringing in my ear. I heard them first when I was 11, at the *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* in 1963. In high school, I traveled to Israel for the first time as International President of one of the largest Jewish Youth groups, B'nai B'rith Girls. While driving to the Dead Sea, I noticed enclaves behind barbedwire fences, and I asked what they were. My hosts informed me that these were refugee camps. I was angry; how could Israel allow Holocaust refugees to live like this? No, they told me, these are "Arab" refugees. Where are the refugees from? I asked. After a long silence, I understood that the refugees were not from distant lands - but from the very land that I had been told was empty.

In 1973, I returned to Israel, by chance on one of the last planes that landed before the start of the “Yom Kippur” war. I sang for wounded Israeli soldiers in Be’er Sheva and met Palestinian and Bedouin students in the Sinai desert.

Years later, as a [REDACTED] curator, I mentored a brilliant young Gazan arts organizer, [REDACTED]. He helped to produce the first cultural festival in Gaza after the Intifada. I was hosted by his family in their 16th century, now demolished, home. In 1994, I watched Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin sing *Shir l’shalom* (song of peace) minutes before he was killed while calling for an end to Israeli occupation and a 2-State solution. I was pregnant. Ten years later, my daughter spent 4th grade at [REDACTED] bilingual Hebrew/Arabic [REDACTED] school. I’ve stood in Jerusalem with *Women in Black* to call for co-sovereign sharing of this rocky soil that multiple peoples pray in and toward. For years, I taught a course entitled *Living Jerusalem* in conjunction with Palestinian and Israeli colleagues at [REDACTED] University and [REDACTED] University. Although I won teaching awards, the course was cancelled due to its Palestinian content at [REDACTED] University and [REDACTED] University.

I lay out my experience so that you will understand that the depth of my care compels me to demand a Ceasefire as a first step in what will be a very long process of Israeli reparation and atonement, based on justice and sovereignty for Palestinian people.

I speak as a Jewish mother, scholar, arts organizer, and Alexandria resident. Come have coffee with me, invite me to speak to your congregation, and allow me to share my Palestinian and Israeli folklore and music research.

In 1965, the Chad Mitchell Trio sang this refrain:

We didn’t know at all,

We didn’t see a thing.

You can't hold us to blame,

We didn't know.

It was a terrible shame,

But we can't bear the blame.

Oh no, not us, we didn't know.

But, dear Human Rights Commissioners,

WE DO KNOW. And We share the Blame.

We must stop our tax dollars from supporting death, genocide, carnage; call it what you will. This trauma will reverberate across generations. Demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire, save innocent lives, including those of Israeli hostages. Let Alexandria help lead the already very overdue way forward.

Stop dragging your feet, start searching your soul!

Dr. King challenged us to be "global citizens," in his memory, and as Alexandria residents, please pass the Ceasefire resolution NOW.

Todah rabah uv'racha, Thank you and blessings,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]