

Dear Ms. Johnson,

September 18, 2018

[I'd appreciate acknowledgement of your receipt of this e-mail. Thanks.]

We met briefly in July of last year at the press conference when Rev. Jose Chicas was provided sanctuary at The School of Conversion, affiliated with John's Baptist Church in Durham. And we met when you spoke at the Abrahamic Initiative on the Middle East "Linking Liberation Struggles" forum held on the NC Central campus October 2016.

I am writing in response to the letter/article by Dr. Adam Goldstein titled "Don't Retweet Anti-Semites: An Open Letter to Durham City Council Member Jillian Johnson", <https://voice4israel.com/open-letter-jillian-johnson/>, published on the Voice for Israel website August 28.

I am writing because I believe that Dr. Goldstein made some statements that were not true and I am writing to say, in my opinion, he was discourteous to be lecturing you. My criticism of Dr. Goldstein's statements are certainly not an attack on him personally. I do not know him and I am sure he is to be commended for his vocation as a family physician.

Please feel free to share this e-mail.

Derogatory Statement

Goldstein begins: "I saw last week that you chose to retweet a derogatory statement by Jeremy Corbyn against Israel." The statement made by Corbyn was "What deserves unequivocal condemnation is the killing of over 160 Palestinian protesters in Gaza by Israeli forces since March, including dozens of children." A Reuter's World Report dated September 14, 2018 gives the death toll as 177. A Middle East Monitor article dated September 11 gives the total of children killed as 39. Goldstein lectures you for retweeting a statement he calls "derogatory." While the statement is critical of Israeli forces, it is accurate. Goldstein's calling the statement derogatory, would have been like plantation owners calling abolitionists statements opposing slavery derogatory. It's not the right word. Note that Goldstein misrepresents your "offense," making it sound worse by saying the statement is about Israel itself, not "Israeli forces", as Corbyn states. They are not the same. Goldstein attacks the messenger and does not address the message, which is horrendous. He cannot attack it because it is unassailable. His concern is for the portrayal of Israel, not for the unarmed Palestinian protesters the Israeli forces killed.

Note that Goldstein says in a sidebar: "*Mayor Pro Tempore Jillian Johnson retweets a perpetuation of the myth that Israel indiscriminately targets civilians.*" The tweet said no such thing. Goldstein has not heeded the admonitions Mayor Schewel directed to the Voice for Israel organization in his wrap up statement at the end of the discussion regarding the resolution, that included this remark: "It does not help this discussion to say things that are not true in order to whip up support for yourself." at 11:30 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5mWJ2K9-7I&feature=youtu.be>.

Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor

I have read this book and it does inform one about Pro-Israel thinking and feeling. And it does occasionally condemn the injustices inflicted upon the Palestinian people by the Israeli government. But, the book has its flaws. Too often it is clearly oriented around dual narratives and false equivalences.

Here is a critique of the book by a respected Palestinian author that I think is thoughtful and a measured response.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/24/books/review/letters-to-my-palestinian-neighbor-yossi-klein-halevi.html>

Last paragraph of critique:

"I agree with you that peace can come only if we succeed in sharing this land and living on it with justice and fairness for both nations. And I will forever agree with your sentiment that the "violence, suppression, rage, despair" that characterizes our relationship must end. But perhaps the problem with your letters is that they

don't read as if they are seeking an answer, hoping for that Palestinian neighbor — me — to respond, but instead seem like lectures, half a conversation with a partner who is expected to stay quiet and listen."

There are many books and articles and statements that provide counter narratives to the "Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor," but for the sake of the issue at hand there is nothing more pertinent than the remarks made by Mayor Schewel in his wrap statement at the council meeting:

"I am a Jew. I am a Zionist. I believe in the existence of the state of Israel. I fear for its survival. But I know the terrible traumas visited on us as a people, we are now visiting on the others in Gaza and in the West Bank. And to me not only are our mortal souls in danger because of that, but I also believe that the survival of the Jewish state is dependent on doing justice to the Palestinians and I do not believe that we are. And when I say "we", I include myself. So, that is the context in which I view this statement. And I appreciate everything I have heard tonight."

Unlike the Halevi book, which Raja Shehadeh refers to as "half a conversation," the mayor listened respectfully to both sides. Goldstein says in referencing the book: "... one of the main obstacles to peace in the Middle East is an inability to hear a side of the narrative different from our own." I hope Dr. Goldstein heard the mayor.

Demonizing Israel

Goldstein says:

"A bottom line is that if you continue to listen to and promote only one narrative, whether it be the in the Durham Council's statement on terrorism and police singling out and demonizing Israel, or giving credence to those with decades long track records of fostering hostility against Israel, and promote both narratives in ways that alienate substantial members of your own community who have a different narrative that is equally valid, you will never get to the place you hope of an enduring peace in the Middle East."

"Demonizing Israel" is often rhetoric used by those who do not like to hear anything critical said about Israel. The statement did not demonize Israel. The tweet under discussion and the mayor's wrap up statement did rightfully criticize Israel. That is not demonizing Israel. Along the lines of referring to the tweet as "derogatory," saying that criticizing Israel is demonizing Israel is like saying abolitionists demonized plantation owners.

Goldstein ends with lecturing you about changing your ways in order that you may hope for peace in the Middle East. The key to resolving any issue or dispute it to establish the truth. He accuses you of accepting sources that are not truthful, without once providing a rebuttal to what he might see as untruthful. Worse than that, his statements seem to suggest he seeks to silence those who are telling the truth. Even worse he makes false statements himself like: "*Mayor Pro Tempore Jillian Johnson retweets a perpetuation of the myth that Israel indiscriminately targets civilians.*" Those who wish to silence the legitimate criticism of a country, any country, for its human rights abuses are complicit in the perpetuation of those abuses.

Conclusion

I admire the courageous stand that you and your fellow council members and the mayor have taken and know life has not been made easier for you given the pervasive and sustained and often harsh push back you have received. You are great protectors of truth and justice.

Sincerely,

Sam Bryan
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