

April 8, 2016

To: Mayor Pam Hemminger and City Council members
From: Miriam Thompson and Rev. J. Mark Davidson, Co-Conveners
Abrahamic Initiative on the Middle East
Cc: AIME Steering Committee members

Dear Elected leaders,

Early this week, we shared our deep concern with the decision of our Chapel Hill Mayor and Council to host 4 Israeli Knesset members, whose tour is sponsored by the U. S. State Department's International Visitors' Leadership Program, and coordinated in the Triangle by Raleigh based International Focus.

We understand you have confirmed plans to host the delegation this coming Monday, April 11th, starting at 1pm, following which the members will visit the Botanical Gardens. We understand you plan to host the meeting in the Town Hall conference room, and open the Town Hall conversation to the public. However, the Mayor's office has informed us that NO public comment will be solicited because the meeting is not a regularly scheduled business meeting. However, we can find no policy that precludes the Council from a more democratic process. We were invited to submit targeted questions and comments to our Town's elected officials that they might consider posing to Knesset visitors to sharpen the conversation. We have cited some guiding commentary and questions below that we hope are helpful. But because of the concerns we will enumerate below, we continue to press the Council to reconsider its decision AND allow public comment at a public meeting.

Our deep concerns over the Mayor and Council's decision to host the Knesset member delegation rest on the following:

- a/ This is a tour that you were NOT obliged to host, by representatives of the Israeli Parliament or Knesset dominated by Prime Minister Netanyahu's Likud Party;
- b/ The Likud government's expanding and brutal Occupation of and egregious human rights violations against Palestinians, and the Occupation's threats to a just, and secure peace for Palestinians and Israelis, as we will document below, contradicts the values we hold dear as a human rights city;
- c/ Based on our values, the Council has explicitly and boldly rejected our own NC Executive and Legislative bodies' discriminatory policies (at the same time we host representatives of a government that violates these values and principles).
- d/ Based on our values, our Town has also passed policies and ordinances that seek to honor and protect the value of human life of every resident who lives and works in Chapel Hill and every community in our State.

BASED ON THE VALUES AND ACTIONS OF OUR HUMAN RIGHTS CITY OF CH THAT WE URGE THE COUNCIL SHARE IN MONDAY'S CONVERSATION (SEE ABOVE), AND BASED ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS WORK OF MANY OF YOUR CONSTITUENTS, WE

HAVE ATTACHE SUGGESTED QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS FOR KNESSET MEMBERS' COMMENTS, SPECIFICALLY WHAT ROLE HAVE THEY PLAYED IN PROMOTING OR VIGOROUSLY OPPOSING THE DOCUMENTED ISRAELI GOVERNMENT ACTIONS CITED BELOW?

1. Both the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Human Rights Watch have condemned the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment of Palestinian children while in the Israeli military detention system, even though Israel is a signatory to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1984 Convention Against Torture. Night raids into Palestinian homes in the West Bank remove, detain and imprison each year some 700 Palestinian children aged 12-17.

Question: Noting these documented government sponsored practices, how will you and your Knesset colleagues respond to and change policy, and honor the two international conventions your country has signed.
2. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that operates in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, reports (covered by Reuters News Agency) that the Israeli military has more than tripled its demolitions of Palestinian structures to make way for the expansion of Israeli settlements.

Question: If you believe in the end of the Occupation, and a just and secure peace, a democratic, livable and equitable community for both Palestinians and Israelis, can you explain how the steady demolition and expropriation of Palestinian land, and the existing internationally recognized illegal settlements and their expansion will bring about such a state?
3. In our human rights city of CH, and in our County, we aim to provide all our public workers a living wage. According to the Israeli workers' rights group, KavLaOved, the World Bank estimates that Palestine loses over \$3.4 billion a year because of a two track system of labor laws and protections that woefully underpays Palestinian workers in Israel – far below the minimum wage paid to Israeli Jewish workers.

Question: How will you press your government to immediately change these discriminatory labor practices?
4. In our human rights city and country, we honor the right of free speech - even politically uncomfortable speech. Yet we note that since the 2006 Palestinian elections, 12 Palestinian members of the Palestinian Legislative Council have been detained in Israel prisons without charge.

Question: Will you investigate these detentions and assure equal protection of the law afforded Israeli Jewish citizens?
5. Israel has a law against "incitement" under which Palestinian citizens of Israel are often prosecuted, including journalists like the recent case of Razi Nabulsi, jailed because of a face book post. Attacks on Israeli Jewish journalists who criticize Israeli policy have also been detained and threatened.

Question: Will you investigate this practice and assure violations of free speech are guaranteed to all Israeli residents?

6. The Knesset has voted to suspend democratically elected members who are alleged to have any relationship with Palestinian protestors or their families. This law obviously targets Palestinian legislators in the Knesset, and was sparked by a legislator who met with a Palestinian family grieving over the death of their son by Israeli police.
Question: Did you support this decision? And how do you justify such a decision by a nation that calls itself “democratic.”

We urge you share with the Knesset members a valuable human rights requirement in U.S. law. Our U.S. Government, under the Foreign Assistance Act and the Leahy Amendment, is prohibited from supplying military aid to any country whose human rights violations can be documented. Although this critical piece of legislation needs far greater enforcement, it does provide our faith and human rights constituents an essential tool. Our U.S. State Department is required to investigate whether the use of over \$3.5 billion tax payer dollars in military aid to Israel supports human rights violations, Petitions to the State Department include most recently:

- Senator Leahy and 10 Congress members have petitioned the State Department to investigate Israeli military extrajudicial killings of Palestinians, documented by Amnesty International and other internationally recognized human rights organizations.
- The Abrahamic Initiative on the Middle East is pursuing Congressional support that would call upon the State Department to investigate the carnage in Gaza as a result of the 2015 Israeli Protective Edge bombing campaign (the latest in three years of bombing campaigns).
- Twelve national Faith Ministers who have similarly petitioned the State Department.

Finally, we urge our elected leaders to put our human rights city of Chapel Hill into the forefront of local and global human rights work: from Raleigh to Palestine, including: getting on to the Amnesty International website and signing their petition; going to our website – aimeproject.org to learn more about our work and our amazing faith and human rights allies.

Sincerely,

Miriam Thompson,
J. Mark Davidson
Co-Conveners, AIME

p.s. AIME with the help of its allies, has catalogued an overwhelming amount of data. We will provide a more comprehensive package than this letter can provide.