

Thank you for your detailed coverage of the April 11th visit of four members of the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) that was sponsored by the U.S. State Department's International Visitors' Leadership Program. The tour was coordinated by the Raleigh based International Focus. Our Town of Chapel Hill agreed to host. Your news article captured some of the key testimony at both the afternoon meeting between Council and Knesset members, and at the evening's scheduled Town Council meeting. I was honored to join community leaders in attendance at both events. Although resident voices were raised initially in opposition to the invitation, the visit has offered an important opportunity for faith and human rights leaders to briefly testify and expose \$3.5 billion in U.S. military aid to Israel that supports (with our tax dollars) Israel's Occupation of Palestine; its illegal settlements built on expropriated land and tens of thousands of Palestinian home demolitions; its night raids by police, detention and imprisonment of Palestinian children as young as 10; its overwhelming military might and devastating aerial bombardment and destruction of Gaza and civilian death toll that the UN warns my drive Gaza out of existence.

The documented evidence that faith human rights leaders shared with Knesset and Council members, was provided by internationally recognized human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the UN's Human Rights Commission, Doctors Without Borders and Israel's own beleaguered human rights organizations (see www.aimeproject.org). . Yet the Knesset members' response was to attack the residents who testified, and flatly and angrily deny the violations committed against Palestinians in both the Occupied territory and within Israel. Shamefully, one of the Knesset members stood up and attacked the standing of a Palestinian American who rose to speak about the struggle of his family who still reside on the Occupied West Bank, and whose home has been expropriated. As reported in your story, one Council member was so appalled at the Likud member's outburst, she walked out of the meeting.

Of course it is not only the Knesset members who deny the pain and dispossession caused by almost 50 years of their country's Occupation of Palestine, and its threat to a just and secure peace for both Israelis and Palestine in a land whose resources are equitably shared. We know how painful it is to face our own country's dark history and current campaigns against oppressed groups – too often absent in our text books and classrooms. And let's look at our current NC State elected leadership and its appalling discriminatory legislation, and the 2016 political campaign rhetoric that continues to demonize and exclude the "other."

This week's event opened up a conversation that must continue; we are nationally known as a Human Rights City. We struggle to assure our residents are treated equitably. We are vigorous opponents of HB2 and all forms of discrimination. It is therefore incumbent on all our Town elected officials, staff, and residents to establish a strengthened democratic decision making process that would assure visitors to and residents of our Town honor the principles and standards we have established as a Human Rights City.

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Chapel Hill,