



The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of Adelaide
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City of Adelaide
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Dear Lord Mayor

I am writing to express the dismay of the Australian Friends of Palestine Association (AFOPA) in relation to the Adelaide City Council's recent decision to not light up the Adelaide Town Hall in the Palestinian colours, as you did for Israel.

AFOPA is a not-for-profit South Australian organisation, located in the Adelaide CBD, which advocates for a just peace for the Palestinian people based on international law and UN resolutions (www.afopa.com.au).

AFOPA has a large and diverse supporter base (including many Adelaide city residents) who are troubled by the Adelaide City Council's lack of understanding of the root cause of the current conflict - the 75 years of oppression since the creation of the state of Israel in Palestine - as well as Council's indifference to the immense suffering that the Palestinian people are currently experiencing at the hands of the Israeli state.

The current situation in Gaza did not start on 7 October 2023. Indeed, the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, stated on 24 October, *It is important to also recognise the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation.*

The current conflict cannot be resolved without the effective deconstruction of the oppressive conditions faced by the Palestinian people under occupation. It is within this context that I bring the following facts to your attention:

15 May 2023 marked 75 years since the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from their homeland in 1948 to establish Israel. Zionist militia killed 15,000 Palestinians in mass atrocities, destroyed over 530 towns and villages, made refugees of at least 750,000 Palestinians from a population of 1.9 million and forcibly took 78% of historic Palestine.

The remaining 22% of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza were occupied by Israel 19 years later and remain under illegal occupation. This 22% is now significantly less given that Israel has illegally settled more than 650,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank. These settlers routinely harass and murder Palestinians while burning their homes and farms in order to take more land.

In Gaza, the Palestinian people have been living under siege since 2007 in the world's largest open-air prison. 2.3 million people caged in an area of 365 square kilometres - the size of Victor Harbor. Israel's blockade by land, sea and air has been compounded by 6 massive Israeli bombing campaigns on Gaza, resulting in unimaginable hardship for the Palestinian people. The Israeli government regularly and openly refers to these bombardments as *mowing the lawn*: a short-term strategy for "managing" the conflict but not doing anything to address the root causes but just removing the unruly elements.

Leading international human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israel's own organisation B'Tselem, have meticulously documented how Israel practices the crime of apartheid against Palestinians. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed this when he stated, *Israel is not a state of all its citizens. According to the Basic Nationality Law we passed, Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people - and only it.*

Evidence of Israel's apartheid policies and practices pervade every aspect of Palestinian life; they are too numerous to mention but include: the separation wall which makes freedom of movement impossible for Palestinians, over 500 fixed and flying military checkpoints, roads for Jews only, destruction and theft of homes to make way for Jewish settlers, destruction and theft of agricultural land, arbitrary arrest and administrative detention without charge, the taking of children in the dead of the night from their homes by IDF soldiers, ongoing indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilians and the imprisonment of children.

Palestinians are now at the mercy of the most right wing, extremist Israeli government ever. The relentless expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (West Bank and East Jerusalem) supported and funded by this government has accelerated and intensified repression and violence against Palestinians. The West Bank, nowhere near Gaza, has since 7 October experienced unprecedented numbers of murders of Palestinians by the Israeli army and fanatical extremist Jewish settlers, including the destruction of two entire villages.

It is this government that is pulverising Gaza resulting in 22,000 Palestinians killed, including 8,697 children. More than 40,160 people have been injured and 1.84 million displaced. They have nowhere to go as every inch of Gaza is being bombed.

Recent polling of the Australian people* has identified majority support (over 56%) for the Australian Government to call for an immediate ceasefire. A clear majority (57%) of Australians said the Government should increase pressure on Israel to allow for immediate humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. According to this poll, 40% believe that Australia is favouring Israel. It is clear that governments at all levels in Australia are out of step with their constituents.

At AFOPA's Palestine Centre for Peace located in Frome Street, Adelaide, we have been inundated with people calling, emailing and visiting to voice their support for justice for Palestinians - both in relation to the current crisis and an end to the occupation. People are often grief stricken, distressed and sickened by the Israeli atrocities they are seeing day after day. We have been humbled by the offers of assistance, predominantly from people who have not previously engaged with us or with this issue. It is important for you to know that many people have expressed incredulity in relation to the Adelaide City Council's decision to light up the Town Hall in the colours of the oppressor, while refusing to light up the Town Hall in the colours of the oppressed and dispossessed.

Millions of people around the world are taking to the streets in increasing numbers week after week to bring attention to Israel's murderous campaign in Gaza, ongoing violations of international law and the root cause of this disaster for the Palestinian people - the occupation. This includes many many thousands of Jewish people.

Adelaide has not seen such extraordinary numbers of people taking to the streets about a foreign conflict since the Iraq war. In addition, we are seeing ever increasing numbers of people at the grassroots from different parts of civil society - unions, churches, youth organisations, Arabic and Muslim communities, Jewish groups, charitable groups, health workers, maritime workers - mobilising on the side of justice, human rights, international law and human decency.

By choosing to light up the Town Hall in Israeli colours and then refusing to light it up in Palestinian colours, the Adelaide City Council appears to have demonstrated a serious lack of understanding of the historical context of the current war on Gaza as well as the enormous scale of the human suffering currently being perpetrated by Israeli forces. The response in the community also does not seem to be appreciated. The immense and disproportionate human suffering of the Palestinian population has been minimised and Palestinians dehumanised. The message received by South Australia's Palestinian, Arabic and Muslim communities, as well as South Australians from all backgrounds and walks of life, is that 22,000 Palestinian lives are worth less than 1200 Israeli lives.

AFOPA has taken sides. Apartheid was wrong in South Africa, and it is wrong in Palestine/Israel. We stand firmly on the side of dismantling occupation and apartheid in order for a just peace to be achieved for both Palestinians and Israelis. In doing so we stand with the international community, which has taken to the streets in millions to call for justice.

We also believe that we can only address these challenges and find a way forward through open communication, including at the local level. To that end, we ask for a meeting with you with the aim of assisting the Adelaide City Council to understand and act on the hurt and damage caused by Council's recent decision. We would also be pleased to welcome you and any Council member to the Palestine Centre for Peace.

Yours sincerely



Christa Christaki
Chairperson

*Roy Morgan Poll 18 November 2023

Why Palestine? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights. Edward Said

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