



Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham
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Dear Senator Birmingham

The Australian Friends of Palestine Association (AFOPA) is a not-for-profit organisation based in South Australia which, since 2004, has advocated for justice for the Palestinian people according to UN Resolutions and International Law.

We recently became aware that you are leading a cross-party delegation to Israel, funded by the Australia Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC). This decision is deplorable and unconscionable and leaves us in no doubt that the tour is aimed solely at ensuring that Australian policy is unashamedly biased towards Israel and reinforces Israel's propaganda.

AFOPA has a large and diverse member and supporter base which is appalled that Australia's alternative Foreign Minister would participate in a delegation funded by a pro-Israel lobby group that supports Israel's war crimes, brutal military occupation and the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people.

Millions of people around the world are taking to the streets week after week in ever increasing numbers to call for a ceasefire in the war on Gaza, for the passage of adequate humanitarian aid to the starving and desperate people there, for an end to the occupation of Palestine and for an end to apartheid. This includes many, many thousands of Jewish people who are saying loud and clear "not in our name".

Adelaide has not seen such extraordinarily numbers of people taking to the streets over a foreign issue since the Iraq war. In addition, people of diverse backgrounds and age groups and from all parts of civil society are self-activating and mobilising in huge numbers in support of Palestine. By undertaking this AIJAC funded trip you have severely underestimated the anger of the Australian people who are witnessing war crimes in real time.

At AFOPA's Palestine Centre for Peace we have been inundated with people offering support, most of whom have never interacted with this issue. They are grief stricken and sickened by Israel's unrelenting murder of the people of Gaza and the pulverisation of their homes, mosques, churches, hospitals and infrastructure. They are adamant that they will hold Australia's leaders to account at the next election.

We are alarmed that you have taken, in full view of the Australian public, the side of war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing and a complete disregard of international law. In doing so you have placed yourself on the wrong side of history. In addition, your actions demonstrate a complete disconnect from the values of the Australian community who will no longer tolerate unquestioning support of a genocidal, far-right extremist state that acts outside of international law with impunity.

AFOPA and millions of Australians have also taken sides. We and they stand firmly on the side of a just peace and the dismantling of oppression and occupation. In doing so we stand with the international community, including the vast majority of the United Nations General Assembly.

The current situation in Gaza did not start on 7 October 2023 as the Australian public is led to believe. The Palestinian people in Gaza have been living under an inhumane siege since 2007. Israel has caged 2.3 million people in an area the size of Victor Harbor, blockaded the area by land, sea and air, controlled the entry of life's essentials and bombed Gaza 6 times. The Israeli government regularly and openly refers to these massive bombings as "mowing the lawn". More and more people understand this and are demanding an end to the occupation and an end to apartheid.

22,000 Palestinians, including 8,697 children have been murdered by Israel since early October. How many more children and babies need to die for you to call out this genocide?

Are 22,000 Palestinian lives worth less than 1200 Israeli lives?

Why are the lives of 250 Israeli hostages more important than the 7000 Palestinians in administrative detention in Israeli prisons, most without charge?

How can it be acceptable to take children from their homes in the middle of the night or snatch them on their way home from school and hold them in prison without their parents knowing where they are?

How can it be acceptable for the homes of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to be demolished or stolen so that Jewish settlers can move in?

Will you protest the accelerated expansion of illegal Jewish settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory which has significantly reduced, along with the Apartheid Wall, the 22% of the West Bank occupied by Israel since 1967? Will you raise that these illegal settlements have rendered a two-state solution impossible? As it was always meant to be?

The West Bank, nowhere near Gaza, has since 7 October 2023, experienced unprecedented murdering and maiming of Palestinians by the Israeli Defence Force and fanatical Jewish settlers, including the destruction of two entire villages. Will you speak up against the atrocities committed by these fanatics, settlers and the army alike?

Will you travel on the roads that are for Jewish people only? Will you experience some of the over 500 fixed and flying checkpoints that every day restrict the movement of Palestinians to their workplaces and to their farms on the whim of an Israeli soldier? Will you stay silent if, as often happens, an ambulance is refused passage through the checkpoint to enable a critically ill Palestinian to reach a hospital?

How can you accept that apartheid was wrong in South Africa while accepting that Israel's system of apartheid is acceptable?

Will you speak with any Palestinians? Perhaps some who are scrabbling through the rubble with their bare hands to find their children? Or whose babies died in their incubators because Israel cut power? Or those whose family members have been eaten by dogs as the relentless bombing made it impossible to retrieve and bury their loved ones?

When will Israel and its allies be satisfied? When every single last Palestinian in Gaza is dead or made a refugee? When every last house, school, mosque and church is destroyed? When the path is clear for Gaza's natural resources to be stolen, just as everything else has been stolen from them?

This AIJAC sponsored trip that you are leading defiles our democracy and Australian values and brings into sharp focus any pretence of support for international law and human rights.

We and our members, supporters and allies, await your response to our questions.

Yours sincerely



Christa Christaki
Chairperson

12 December 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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