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12-12-23

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: Zeina Azzam <azzam.zeina@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 3:51 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Statement to be read at the City Council meeting , 12/12/2023

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To the City Clerk:

I would like to respectfully request to read this statement at the upcoming City Council meeting on 12/12/2023. Thank you.

Zeina Azzam

Statement by Zeina Azzam
To be read at the City Council meeting on December 12, 2023

I applaud the Alexandria City Council for having a proclamation for Human Rights Month. I am aggrieved, however, that the Palestinians were not specifically named in the proclamation this year. I find this an egregious omission that dismisses the human rights of Palestinians, especially with the current situation in Gaza, which the world agrees is one of genocide and ethnic cleansing. With nearly 18,000 people killed by Israel in Gaza, and of them over 7,000 children, it is incumbent on those of us who believe in human rights to recognize the horrific situation there and to identify the human rights violations perpetrated against the Palestinians in Gaza.

The City Council already took a stand of solidarity with Israel after Hamas's October 7th attack, by lighting up City Hall in the colors of the Israeli flag. But the City Council has made no effort to recognize the Palestinian residents of Alexandria who are profoundly affected by the war on Gaza, and some of them have lost family members there. The Arab American community is horrified by these events and many have experienced prejudice and discrimination as a result. Our justice-seeking allies, including many in the Jewish community, are also outraged about the devastating humanitarian situation in Gaza.

I am deeply distressed by any acts of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab hate. Although Islamophobia and anti-Semitism were rightly mentioned in the proclamation, the experience of Palestinians falls under neither of these categories. I am asking the Alexandria City Council to accord the same recognition of the human rights of Palestinians as it does other communities, and to stand in solidarity not only with Israelis, when they are attacked, but also with Palestinians when they are bombed relentlessly, starved of food and water, and displaced from their homes. Why do Palestinians have to constantly ask for acknowledgment of their human rights? Why would the City of Alexandria not make a reference to Palestinians in its human rights resolution at this particularly horrific time of violence against the people of Gaza?

I would like to remind you that our diverse community in Alexandria includes Palestinians and Arab Americans, many Christian and many Muslim, and we have human rights, too. We are tired of being dehumanized by policymakers and the mainstream media. We are sickened by efforts to justify and even normalize Palestinian suffering. It feels like we continually need to be reminding our leaders and lawmakers of our human rights. We ask you to listen to us, to see us as human beings, to understand our pain as our relatives and friends are experiencing unprecedented and horrific suffering in Gaza, and in all of Palestine.

Zeina Azzam

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12-12-23

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: samar najia <najdaj1423@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 11:13 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Comments for December 12, 2023 City Council Meeting

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Dear City Council,

I am an Alexandria resident and a Palestinian American. My mother, Nawal Dajani was a Nakba survivor from 1948 and was made a refugee in Egypt. She lived with me until she passed away in 2015. The months before her death, she was glued to the TV, watching innocent civilians mourn their children during Israel's ironically named Operation Protective Edge. Though she was sitting in the living room in Virginia, her mind and her heart was with her fellow Palestinians in Gaza and with the mothers who buried their children. I would come home from work and find her distraught and depressed.

Today, the genocide of Gaza has left the community of Palestinian Americans in collective depression. 9 years on, history repeats despite the inability of my government to recognize or acknowledge that the assaults and occupation of Gaza have been ongoing since 1948. The Dajani family has lost 6 members so far that we know of. My aunt (my uncle's wife), has lost 5, two of them children, ages 3 and 6 from the ElHelou family. And I am not alone among Alexandria or Virginia's constituents to have lost family. Every Palestinian American I know has lost someone or experienced some form of abuse be it in the West Bank or Gaza.

The City of Alexandria ignores us and pretends we don't exist. The City cannot uphold the rich fabric of its constituents by erasing and sacrificing the Palestinian identity. By removing mention of the "Palestine" or "Palestinian" in its communication and refusing or ignoring the genocide Palestinians are experiencing means one thing- the City of Alexandria condones the most horrific killing of civilians with US made weapons in the 21st century.

When the Nakba of 1948 happened, my family believed that Britain would not allow the Palestinians to be massacred, robbed, raped, and their homes stolen. The Palestinians thought the British would protect the Palestinians, especially when we had fought alongside them in WW2, But Britain did no such thing. Nor did the Palestinians of Gaza believe that the US would stand by while wholesale massacres of civilians proceeded without so much as a security vote against a ceasefire. But the US did just that again.

Will the City of Alexandria stand up for the Palestinian's right to exist? Will the City of Alexandria celebrate or condone genocide? Will it value human rights of Palestinians and equality for all?

Samar Najia
2404723226

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December 11, 2023

Alexandria City Council

December 10, 2023 is the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also the 75th anniversary of the 1948 Nakba, when the Israeli military expelled over 800,000 Palestinians from over 500 towns and villages in Palestine and then blocked the Palestinians' return to their homes and lands in violation of U.N. resolutions. For 75 years, Palestinians have been denied their basic human rights—including the right to life.

The City of Alexandria is home to a large concentration of Arab Americans, including Palestinian Americans. We contribute to our community's diversity and to its cultural richness. Since October 7, the Arab American community has been grieving for hundreds of our Palestinian family members and friends killed in the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza and in the violent ethnic cleansing in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The City of Alexandria's one-sided support for the state of Israel—demonstrated by illuminating City Hall in blue and white for three weeks—is immensely troubling and painful to the Arab American community. For two months, Israel has been besieging and carpet bombing impoverished Gaza—both are war crimes. The civilian death toll is estimated at 20,000 civilians—nearly 50 percent of those killed are children and babies. The president of the United States and Congress are providing full political and financial support for Israel's genocide in spite of the U.S. government's duty to prevent acts of genocide.

We protest the financing of Israel's ongoing ethnic cleansing, occupation, apartheid, and genocide of the Palestinians with our taxes. Every year, \$2 million of Alexandria's federal taxes are used to finance the \$3.8 billion in military aid that the United States gives to Israel (uscpr.org). That is \$10.5 million per day. Virginia's taxpayers provide \$107 million of Israel's total aid package. We want our taxes invested in Alexandria, Virginia!

Palestinians are human beings endowed with inalienable human rights. We appreciate the efforts of the Alexandria Human Rights Commission to promote human rights and inclusion in our community. We expect the City of Alexandria "*to meet its obligation to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms*" for all peoples and residents of our city, including Palestinians and Arab Americans.

Rosemarie M. Esber

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12-12-23



Alexandria Human Rights Commission

123 N. Pitt St, Suite 230
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

703.746.3140

November 11, 2023

The central objective of the Alexandria Human Rights Commission is to promote inclusivity among all members of our diverse and beautiful populace. Few municipalities in the United States have as many residents hailing from all corners of the globe.

Particularly because of our diverse backgrounds, it is the City's welcoming spirit that attracts all of us to Alexandria and forms the core of what unites us. The sum of our parts is infinitely stronger than each of us are alone. In this vein, no one, or one group of residents, should ever feel unwelcomed or unsafe.

This is exactly why the Human Rights Commission, now more than ever, asks all residents to recommit to recognizing the value of inclusivity. In light of the tragic ongoing events in the Middle East, it is doubly important to appreciate the contributions Palestinian-Americans and other persons of Middle Eastern background, among so many other groups, have made to our community. Our Palestinian and Jewish community members belong here, and we value them.

As we see an increase in hateful and violent Islamophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric and incidents across the country, we want to affirm that Alexandria is a hate-free zone where there is no place for intolerance or bigotry.

Persons who believe they have been victims of discrimination or a hate crime, or have witnessed discrimination or a hate crime, are encouraged to contact the Office of Human Rights at 703.746.3140 for assistance.