

Durham Human Relations  
Commission Golden Belt Office  
Center  
807 E. Main Street, Building 2  
Durham, NC  
27701 6/4/18

Dear Members of the Human Relations Commission,

Thank you very much for allowing us this opportunity to express our concerns regarding the recent actions of the Durham City council. We feel those actions were discriminatory and injurious to our local Jewish community.

In order to be able to more fully understand our pain, it is important to say a few words about the Jewish people. Our story goes back at least 3,500 years. Some might say that it is inexplicable that we have lasted as a nation all these millennia despite exile and oppression. We are bound to each other as a people by tradition, history, ethics and genetics. Throughout the centuries we have longed for our homeland in Israel. The claim that you may have already encountered that our love and attachment to the land of Israel is simply “political Zionism” ignores our rich and complicated history.

The Jewish people again collected themselves in their homeland and created the State of Israel in 1948, with the blessing of the world community. This provides both a realization of our traditional longings and a refuge, (you might even say a “safe space”) for us after centuries of oppression.

It is as a people, not just as followers of a religion that we feel discriminated by the current actions.

There has been a concerted effort to demonize and delegitimize the state of our Jewish people, Israel. Activists seeking to end the existence of Israel are continuously spreading deceitful accusations against the Jewish Homeland. Their pervasive condemnation has convinced well-meaning individuals that Israel among all the countries in the world is a nation so cruel, so repressive and so unjust, that it deserves to be shunned. Tell the big lie repeatedly enough and people will begin to believe it.

The petition put forth from the Jewish Voice for Peace and other Israel-demonizing groups, which initiated the process in Durham is part of this hurtful process and is a painful echo of the ancient “blood libel”. It includes the following: *“The Israeli Defense Forces and the Israel Police have a long history of violence and harm against Palestinian people and Jews of Color”*. It added another big lie: *“These tactics further militarize U.S. police forces that train in Israel, and this training helps the police terrorize Black and Brown communities here in the US”*.

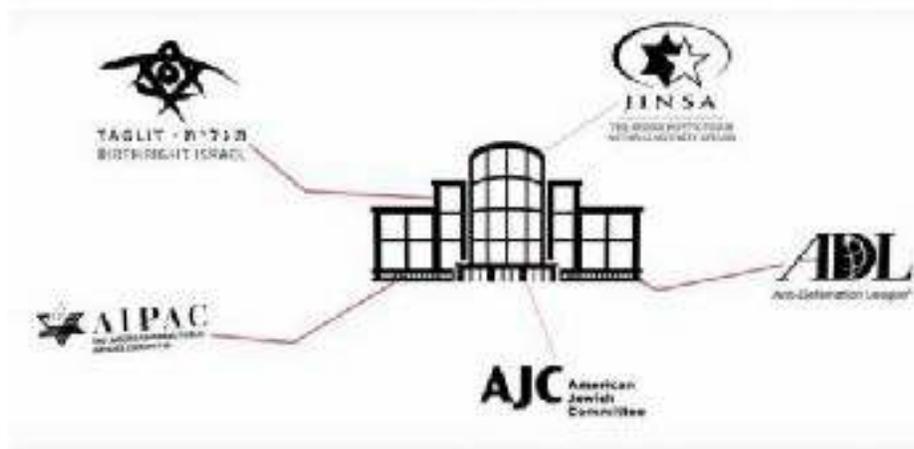
This is just unadulterated propaganda and slander. There is no evidence to support the claims that this training helps the police terrorize people of color here in the US. And yet the City Council was sufficiently convinced by this propaganda, that all six, (excluding the mayor) signed it, without searching for factual confirmation.

The local JVP branch's initiative was engineered by the national JVP campaign called "DeadlyExchange", which is how they mischaracterize training of American law enforcement by Israeli police. They diabolically blame Israel training for police brutality against people of color:



The national JVP campaign systemized their lie by adding attacks on prominent mainstream Jewish Organizations:

*"To shut down the DeadlyExchange, we feel obligated to start with these complicit organizations in our own communities. They include:"*



*"We will bring this fight to the policy makers in our communities to hold accountable the Jewish institutions who run and fund the DeadlyExchange."*

So it is not just Israel which they stigmatized, but treasured American Jewish institutions, which are part of the fabric of American Jewish life. This campaign and similar initiatives are now telling the Jewish people in America, you are only acceptable if you very explicitly disavow any support for Israel. In fact our very humanity has been called into question, if we do not join in denouncing Israel.

We see the decision to include a thoroughly gratuitous singling out of Israel in their statement by a government body as dangerously close to Anti-Semitism. In fact, the State Department recognizes the act of singling out Israel as part of the definition of the word “anti-Semitism.”

The City Council has seemingly chosen Jews as one minority without the freedom to decide when they are aggrieved. (Below my letter, you will find portions of a recent essay by Carly Pildis in Tablet Magazine entitled: [Jews Get to Define Anti-Semitism](#). I beseech you to read the enclosed segment, as it directly pertains to our situation.)

The fact that this action is a governmental body project adds to the pain. The eventual statement by our City Council did not reiterate the egregious accusations which had been made by the petitioners. It did not need to, as the Council’s actions were more than sufficient to support the petitioners’ claims: That the Jewish State among all the nations in the world is the one which Durham needs to call out for scorn and to reject. JVP is celebrating this nationally as confirmation of their accusations against Israel.

Peoples of color in our nation have throughout our history been oppressed. It is a shameful stain upon America, which we continue to grapple with. (Jews have always stood at the forefront of the fight for civil rights in our country.) Today, we all as Americans struggle as to how to rectify persistent injustice.

But in our current climate, desperate aggrieved people look to find someone to blame. This initiative is particularly pernicious because it directly alleges that the Jewish people who overwhelmingly support Israel are complicit in police brutality and oppression against people of color. Driving such a wedge between minorities in our community is counter-productive policy, which only leads to more hate, discord and increased potential for violence.

The mayor himself inadvertently pedaled this offensive thesis even as he admonished the petitioners for making, what is really a rather benign untrue statement. The Mayor stated that the petitioner’s untruthful claim that Durham police forces had trained with Israel, was “damaging to police community relations. Attacking police force with [such] falsehoods hurts their ability to build trust with the community.” Consider what this in essence means: Any hint of contact between the Durham police force and the Jewish State of Israel may be considered toxic to the community.

The process of unfairly blaming another people for your misfortunes is called scapegoating, and we Jewish people are very well acquainted with it. My dad experienced it in Germany, where it began with hurtful words, progressed to government sanctioned boycotts as well as other discrimination and ended in genocide with the murder of his parents Max and Selma. That was at a time when Israel did not exist.

In an environment of rising hatred stemming from the extremes of both the right and the left, this action has created a very chilling atmosphere for the Jewish people in our community. This city council action singled out the only Jewish State, without any due process or justification and was completely unnecessary. It was on the contrary, inspired by hateful and destructive propaganda and intended to defame the only Jewish State. We Jews have been made to feel unwelcome here. It has promoted antagonism for the local Jewish people and division within the Durham community, without benefit to anyone, but the haters who have been emboldened.

We turn to you as a commission entrusted to ensure that no minority is mistreated and discriminated against. We hope you will see fit to state unequivocally that this decision was wrong and should be reversed, by any means you feel appropriate.

Sincerely,



Michael Ross  
President Voice for Israel

Essay by Carly Pildis from Tablet Magazine entitled: [Jews Get to Define Anti-Semitism](#)

*A central tenet of anti-oppression work is that marginalized communities are the authors of their own experiences... I cannot possibly grasp all of the ways racism shows up throughout the life of a person of color. As much as I may try, my white privilege will inevitably blind me to how simple daily acts [like driving my car](#), [walking my baby in the park](#), or [waiting in a Starbucks](#) can quickly become dangerous. Conversely, my husband as well as male friends and colleagues may struggle to understand how gender shows up in my daily life, so they should listen to me when I describe what my experiences are and how they affect me.*

*Anti-Semitism, like most forms of systemic oppression, is difficult to see if you don't experience it directly. If you have never been asked to leave an anti-war protest because you were wearing a Magen David necklace, you may not understand how we are pushed out of movements. If your house of worship does not require 24-hour private security, armed guards, and bag searches to enter, you may not understand how we move through the world. If your family doesn't include people who were ghettoized, beaten, starved, and gassed to death in concentration camps, you probably don't experience a neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville—or "pro-Palestinian" demonstrators burning the Israeli flag and chanting for the deaths of Jews in Israel—the same way that we do. If a passerby has never screamed at a crowd of worshippers, or drawn swastikas or rats on your spiritual home, or accosted you in your workplace and started screaming about purported Israeli atrocities or "Likudnik" conspiracies, you will not understand our fear of being Jewish in public... If you have never been told to tolerate being called satanic or evil, or compared to an insect for the sake of coalition building or [political unity](#), you may struggle to understand why many of us are so angry at the progressive movement. I have experienced all of the above.*

*Anti-Semitism attempts to chip away at our voices, our culture, our careers, our relationships, and ultimately our humanity. If you haven't lived it, in all of its insidious silencing, it is difficult to understand. Despite the FBI's yearly hate-crime statistics, it can be difficult for people who are not Jewish to believe that anti-semitism is real, violent, and scary—the same way that it can be easy for some to callously dismiss the lived experience of women, people of color, and gay, lesbian and trans people. Which is why those who carry the banner of justice—and especially those who present themselves to others as models for and leaders of progressive movements—should always be listening hard to historically oppressed groups, Jewish or otherwise.*

