

May 8, 2024

Dear Members of the Academic Senate,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today on this matter of urgent humanitarian concern and moral imperative. As a Muslim American, a member of CR's Associate Faculty, and the faculty advisor for CR's Humboldt Muslim Community Network, I urge each of you to formally support a call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Palestine. It is within your purview and duty as an academic body to advocate for resolutions that promote human dignity and peace. This is a necessary political stance, but it is also a plea for humanity and for the kind of justice and compassion that forms the foundation of CR's academic values.

From a humanitarian standpoint, it is essential to recognize that the current escalation of violence in Gaza has resulted in unbearable suffering and loss of life. Right now, in Rafah, there are over 1 million Palestinian civilians under siege after being displaced from their places of shelter. Scores of innocent people, mostly children, are being brutally killed every day by US-made Israeli bombs, drone, and tank fire. This week, President Biden delayed a shipment of over 3500 munitions, a fraction of what the US has already supplied Israel, because of the probability that Israel will use them to escalate the current bombing of the civilian population in Rafah, which UN experts agree would be an unimaginable humanitarian catastrophe.

As we all know, the current conflict was triggered on October 7, 2023, when Hamas' resistance operation resulted in 1200 tragic Israeli deaths. Israeli military personnel and innocent civilians were killed by both the Israeli military, who were under orders to execute the "Hannibal Directive," and Hamas fighters. Claims made against Hamas that they beheaded babies and raped women during this operation were thoroughly debunked. Israeli hostages were taken by Hamas with the aim of doing an exchange for the thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, kept in Israeli prisons. These Palestinians are rounded up by Israeli military personnel, usually at the apartheid checkpoints, and held in horrible conditions under "administrative detention" without access to a lawyer or a fair trial.

This has been going on for decades.

Over the past seven months, allegedly in response to the attack by Hamas, Israel has killed over 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza (this does not include those killed in the West Bank) and seriously injured hundreds of thousands, mostly by indiscriminate bombings. An astonishing 70% of those killed have been women and children, many still buried under the rubble. Of the 30 hospitals in the Gaza Strip, most have been bombed and destroyed, and just a handful are still operational. No evidence of a resistance military command center has ever been found under these hospitals, which was the justification used by Israel to bomb them.

Israel has bombed and destroyed historic mosques, thousand-year-old churches, most of Gaza's schools and universities, bakeries, greenhouses, refugee camps, and so many homes that, even with a ceasefire, almost all of Gaza's remaining population—over a million people—will have nowhere to go back to. Hundreds of trucks carrying desperately needed humanitarian aid are parked right now at the Rafah border and most have been refused entry. Families have been torn apart, and many surviving children are enduring famine and have suffered intolerable injuries, including painful, disfiguring burns

inflicted by illegal white phosphorous bombs, made in the USA. Women are giving birth by C-section without anesthesia. Every single day, scores of innocent people are killed or die of starvation.

Each day without a ceasefire, more will die.

As educators and protectors of human dignity, how can we remain silent?

While any one of these atrocities is more than enough to justify calling for a permanent ceasefire, keep in mind that your endorsement also aligns with College of the Redwood's commitment to educational values. A conflict like this, especially one that the International Court of Justice has called a "plausible genocide," severely disrupts education systems, affecting students' ability to learn and grow in a safe environment. By advocating for peace, you are also advocating for the rights of students in Humboldt and around the world, including in Palestine, to have uninterrupted access to education.

Do not underestimate the importance of this decision to act, echoing Cal Poly Humboldt's resolution for a permanent ceasefire. CR and CPH's voices as academic institutions carry weight. They influence policy, they shape public opinion, and they can foster an environment where dialogue and understanding are preferred over conflict and division. By calling for a ceasefire, we contribute to a global outcry that seeks to end this violence, to recognize the state of Palestine, and to restore their rights and their dignity as a people, which have been stripped away repeatedly since 1948.

It is important to understand that the most vocal advocates for dismantling the Israeli apartheid system, for recognizing the state of Palestine, and for a permanent ceasefire are Jewish people—in the US, internationally, and even in Israel. These Jews, warmly embraced by their fellow protesters, proudly say that their faith does not allow them to sit by and watch as these atrocities are committed in their name. One of the chants in the protests, remembering the horrific tragedies the Jewish people endured in the Holocaust, is: "Never Again, Means Never Again for Anyone. None of Us is Free until Palestine is Free." It is therefore absurd to claim that it is anti-Semitic to call for a ceasefire or to support the Palestinian cause—even more so because both Arabic and Hebrew speakers are, by definition, Semitic peoples.

Lastly, it is essential that we, as educators, remember our commitment to scholarly integrity and truth. This includes striving to understand the roots and ramifications of the rich history of the land which has been Palestine for more than 2000 years, and the circumstances under which this conflict arose 76 years ago.

I ask you today to stand on the right side of history—to use your collective voice to advocate for a permanent ceasefire and to push forward the possibilities for peace. Your call is a call to save lives and to show to our student body and faculty that the Academic Senate of the College of the Redwoods values all life equally. This is an opportunity to show that we are not just observers, but active participants in the pursuit of a just and peaceful world.

I hope you will vote with your conscience for peace and an end to this nightmare. Free Palestine.

Laura Kirkpatrick

Associate Professor

Departments of English and Adult Education