

Helen Scott
Board of VT AFL-CIO

Palestine resolution testimony
August 2021

This spring, as the full force of the Israeli military was turned on the Palestinian people, trade unions and activists held a General Strike across historic Palestine, showing extraordinary unity and resolve. Palestinian labor organizations also issued a call for solidarity from the international labor movement. They wrote:

“As Israel escalates its attacks and brutality we need this solidarity more than ever, and we need it urgently in order to restrain Israel's war machine from continuing its massacres even further.

We call on you to stand with us, to speak out, to take action. As trade unions internationally we have a proud tradition of standing up against oppression. We have the power to halt support for racist regimes. The global trade union movement has always played a key and inspiring role in its courageous commitment to human rights and adoption of concrete, ground-breaking, labor-led sanctions against oppressive regimes.”

The Vermont AFL-CIO heeds this call. As a labor council we oppose all forms of racism and discrimination, know the importance of international solidarity, and recognize the power of organized labor to effect positive social change.

We are dismayed by recent “anti-boycott” legislation that has been passed in around 30 states. These unconstitutional measures discriminate against Palestinians, stifle free speech, and criminalize political opinions. These laws have a chilling impact on civil rights and social justice in general.

This resolution offers a powerful and necessary counter to these worrying developments, and sends a strong message that Vermont stands for justice and liberation. The AFL-CIO applauds this committee for bringing it forward, and strongly supports its passage.

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Burke by column

Testimony for Palestine Resolution
Ashley Smith

- I. My name is Ashley Smith
 1. I'm speaking on behalf of the Community Voices for Immigrant Rights
 2. I'm proud to say that we voted to endorse the resolution before you today in solidarity with Palestinians.
 3. We encourage the city councilors here today to vote and campaign for the passage of this resolution. *in the Burlington City Council.*
 4. Palestine is one of the central issues of social justice in our world today. And it is time for Burlington to take a stand in support of Palestinians struggle for their rights and equality.

- II. You may ask why CVIR, which is an immigrant rights group, is in favor of this resolution.
 1. The reason is simple and straightforward.
 2. Palestinians are one of the largest migrant populations in the world today.
 3. Over 5 million Palestinians are refugees scattered throughout the Middle East and around the world.
 4. The Israeli state has driven them from the lands and homes in waves of ethnic cleansing from 1948 right down to today.
 5. In 1948, it drove nearly a million Palestinians from their towns and cities.
 6. And it continues to dispossess Palestinians through colonial settlement.
 7. It is trying to expel them from their homes in East Jerusalem.
 8. It denies those millions of displaced Palestinians the right to return to their homes and land.
 9. And it subjects those outside its boundaries to occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
 10. Inside Israel proper, it denies Palestinian equal rights with a myriad of laws so racist in nature that Human Rights Watch describes Israel as an Apartheid state.
 11. Thus, Palestine and Palestinians are perhaps the most important issue of migrant justice in our world today.

- III. Palestinians are not passive victims. They have struggled for their rights and equality throughout this horrific history of displacement, occupation, and oppression.
 1. Their struggle for liberation has inspired generations of social justice activists. None other than Nelson Mandela declared, "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."
 2. Palestinians continue to call throughout the world for solidarity.

3. And today Palestinians have submitted a resolution before you today and offered you the opportunity to stand with Mandela in solidarity with their struggle for liberation from colonial occupation and apartheid.

IV. It is time to heed their call. Not only is their freedom at stake but that of all us.

1. Across the country, states and cities are criminalizing Palestinians call for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel.
2. That is not only an attack on Palestinians freedom of speech but all of our freedom of speech.
3. It is time to defend their rights and all our of our rights.
4. That undercores the fact that Palestinian liberation is bound up with our collective liberation.

V. It is time for Burlington's City Council to be bold in its support for justice for Palestinians and stand up against the unjust laws being passed against their rights from Israel to the US.

1. You have already set the precedent of standing up against unjust laws and persecution of immigrants.
2. With your passage of No Mas Polimigra you stood up against the deployment of the police against migrants.
3. It is time to do the same for Palestinians.
4. Vote for this resolution, campaign for this resolution, take another stand for migrant justice, and in doing so advance the cause of our collective liberation from Burlington to Bethlehem.

Burlington Resolution in Solidarity with the Palestinian People
Comments by Mousa Ishaq, August 17, 2021

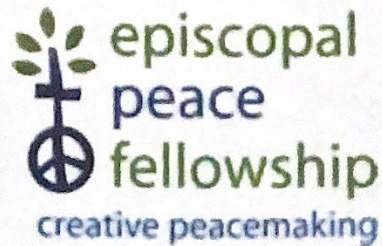
My name is Mousa Ishaq. I am a Vermonter by choice and have lived in the Greater Burlington area since 1978. I want to speak in favor of the resolution in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I was born in the small village of Aboud northwest of Ramallah on the West Bank in Palestine. My family and friends who live in Aboud today have lived under the brutal Israeli military occupation since 1967—that is *54 years*—without any civil or political rights. What does that mean? Their land is confiscated to build illegal “Jewish only” settlements, their olive trees and other crops are destroyed “for security reasons,” the water that flows from Aboud’s many natural springs is dammed up and piped out to settlements while Aboud’s people have restricted access to water that comes from unknown sources. They cannot build, not even an addition to their homes; they need permits to travel, for example, to go to church or the mosque or the hospital; there are Israeli checkpoints everywhere *within Palestinian territory*. This is what it means to have no civil or political rights, and this has been going on for 54 years.

None of this would be possible without massive amounts of U.S. military and other assistance and diplomatic cover.

Supporting this resolution is not against anyone. It is for the good of both Palestinians and Israelis. This unequal and abusive relationship of occupier and occupied, which has lasted for 54 years, is not going to end without outside intervention. The situation is very similar to Apartheid South Africa which did not end its brutal practices until international publicity and the threat of boycott caused it to reexamine its policies and change.

Let us here in Burlington be among the first governmental bodies to help transform the poisoned relationship of Israelis and Palestinians into a relationship of equals with freedom for the Palestinians to control their own future.



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August 6, 2021

To the members of the Burlington City Council:

I am writing in support of the passage of the Burlington Resolution in Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which calls for this body to demand an end to military aid to the State of Israel.

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship is a non-profit which speaks to The Episcopal Church on issues such as the human rights of the Palestinian people, which are violated daily by the State of Israel, being enabled by tax dollars of the citizens of the United States and of Burlington. Our role is to speak truth to power, and to advocate in favor of the eradication of violence and suffering around the globe. It is in my role as Executive Director of Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and our action group, the Palestine Israel Network, that I make this plea to you.

I've had the good fortune to spend time in both Burlington and Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza. Because I am human, I understand that these places are inextricably linked, and that when the people of Palestine suffer because of dollars contributed by the largely unaware citizens of Vermont to the Israeli war machine, everyone suffers. Citizens of Burlington, such as Wafic Faour who has penned the resolution before you, know the injustice in Palestine and are dedicated to eliminating it and this country's significant role therein.

Last month, on Independence Day, I participated in a demonstration in front of your City Hall, along with dozens of others who were concerned with the United States' role in funding the persecution of the Palestinian people. I can think of no better way to honor the freedom that you and I enjoy as Americans than by lifting up the plight of our brothers and sisters across the globe who suffer by reason of our government's ill-conceived support of an occupying army. I urge your passage of this vital resolution, and I will keep you in my prayers for all good things for your wonderful city.

Most sincerely,

Melanie Merkle Atha Executive Director, Episcopal Peace Fellowship