



STATEMENT BEFORE DURHAM CITY COUNCIL
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My name is Rabbi Matthew Soffer, Senior Rabbi of Judea Reform Congregation.

I commend the drafters of this resolution for naming October 7th, when Hamas invaded Israel to brutally massacre more than 1200 innocent civilians. I urge you to include in this resolution acknowledgement of Hamas's brutality—including sexual violence, decapitation, murdering babies, and burning Holocaust survivors alive.

A month after October 7th, I went to Israel, to Kibbutz Nir Oz, where friends and family of our community members live. I walked in the rubble of these homes. I breathed the air of dust and ashes of bones and baby cribs. I cannot unsee what Hamas did, before retreating to embed themselves in the civilian population of Gazans.

And still, I'm someone who does call for an end to this war, a MULTILATERAL ceasefire, of the end of bloodshed, for humanitarian aid, and for the return of the hostages, including loved ones of your constituents.

Public vitriol that only targets Israel and skips over October 7th, serves to grant Hamas immunity for the worst atrocity against Jews since the Holocaust. The accusations of genocide, the calls for Israel to simply disarm itself amidst barrages of missiles—leveled in a moment of unprecedented antisemitism in America, reek of ignorance and hubris, at best.

Despite the raging voices in the public square, there is a conscientious faithful majority who believe there is no self-contradiction in saying, in one breath, that Israel as the State protecting 46% of Jews on earth has a right to defend itself, AND the enduring occupation is a dehumanizing injustice;

There's no contradiction in saying that Jews have a rightful place in their homeland, AND so do Palestinians; nothing contradictory in saying that the hostages must be released immediately, AND the thousands of Palestinians who have been imprisoned by Israel for years without charges must be granted due process. In one breath we can say that Hamas' charter is genocidal, and so, too, are the platforms of Israeli ministers like Itamar Ben-Gvir & Bezalel Smotrich.

Extremism breeds extremism. We are not going to solve that there. But we *can* lead with a higher politic here—if we listen to each other's pain and honor our common values. If we *will* it, surely, we can keep a war overseas from causing war right here.

This resolution is imperfect; it should condemn Hamas explicitly; it should name the 200,000 displaced Israelis. But I support its passage because it moves us closer to each other's hearts and gives us a fighting chance of directing our shared power to the local justice work in Durham that *really* demands the foremost attention of this Council.

Thank you.