

Madison Common Council Meeting – December 5, 2023

My name is Laurie Zimmerman. I am a rabbi of a synagogue here in Madison and am speaking in favor of resolution 108 calling for ceasefire in Gaza. My Jewish values compel me to raise my voice. I thank Alder Wehelie for giving me the opportunity to stand with her and others in our community.

A primary value in Judaism is *pikuach nefesh*, the obligation to save a life. It takes precedence over all other commandments in Judaism. What could be more important than saving the life of a child, of a pregnant woman, of a doctor, of a journalist, of an elderly person? Every human life is sacred. The destruction of Gaza has created suffering on such a massive scale that it is hard to comprehend: 15,500 dead – including 6,000 children. There is no food. No clean water. No electricity. No fuel.

The Torah commands me “not to stand idly by.” And so I refuse to look away as Gaza is being destroyed. Every single one of us has a responsibility to do what we can: to call for ceasefire – an end to killing – and to call for humanitarian aid.

Hamas committed horrendous war crimes on October 7 killing 1200 people and taking 240 people as hostages. My dear friend’s niece was taken hostage and

her husband was murdered. My colleague lost a dear member of his congregation. The Jewish community holds so much grief and fear and anger. But we must not stand idly by. We must not allow a far-right wing government in Israel to flatten Gaza.

I have been working for 25 years to work for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. Back then, there were not many of us who spoke out. But now, so many Jews—and others—call for ceasefire, for humanitarian aid, for a just and democratic future, where Israelis and Palestinians can live with dignity and equality.

This council opposed a pre-emptive military attack on Iraq. It welcomes Syrian refugees. It supported divestment from Sudan. It continues to fund international sister cities in several tumultuous regions of the world. It has waded in the politics of nuclear war, the legacy of slavery, labor rights issues, and protections for trans and non-binary people.

As the Madison Common Council, you hold the power to vote for an end to the killing. This is a small gesture, but it is an important one. The more we join together to say no to Israel's merciless bombing of civilians and no to Hamas' atrocities against civilians, the more lives we can save. Let us not stand idly by.