



Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine

May 21, 2021 - 10 Sivan 5781

The events of the last two weeks in Israel have cast a pall over the season of Shavuot, traditionally a time to celebrate the “first fruits” of the year and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Once again, violence erupted, and those of us with family and friends in Israel watched news coverage with our hearts in our throats, terrified of the rocket attacks on civilians throughout the south, including Tel Aviv, and of the wave of mob violence that targeted Jewish and Arab Israelis as well as Palestinians.

A cease-fire started less than 24 hours before the time that we are issuing this statement, and we hope that it holds – in previous Gaza conflicts the initial cease-fire did not hold.

At its founding, Israel was heralded as an expression of self-determination, as Jews from throughout the diaspora returned to their longed for and revered homeland. Like the creation of many new nations in the last century (e.g., India and Pakistan), the creation of the State of Israel precipitated significant upheaval and humanitarian cost – both for Palestinians who were displaced within the land, and also for the equal number of Jews who fled from violence and threats in Arab nations throughout the Middle East or were expelled from areas then occupied by Jordan, including East Jerusalem.

For over 70 years, Israel has struggled to contend with existential threats to its existence. It has fought and won wars, and has tried to negotiate for peace. Following the Oslo accords, hopes grew that a shared peace might be possible with a true framework for a two-state solution. When the Oslo process foundered, Israel unilaterally disengaged from Gaza in 2005, but Hamas took power in Gaza. Like the Taliban and ISIS, Hamas disregards human life – both Israeli and Palestinian – and cynically locates its military facilities in areas of civilian population and services, including schools and hospitals. Hamas is a fundamentalist, terrorist group which invests heavily in rockets and bombs, often to the neglect of the needs of civil society. Hamas’s principal stated goal is the destruction of the State of Israel. The Jewish tradition honors the sanctity of all human life, and we affirm the ethical imperative to limit casualties wherever and wherever possible, and we are anguished by the loss of both Jewish and Palestinian lives.

Today, Israel remains the only Jewish country. It is the only place where Jewish culture, language, and history are normalized, the only place where Jewish holidays are the default calendar. It is the historical center of Jewish religious and communal life – and it includes Muslim, Druze, Bahai, and Christian citizens, as well as Jews from every corner of the globe. We affirm Israel’s multicultural character and incredible diversity.

Members of our community have many different ideas about what is best for the region. The security of the State of Israel is paramount, but we acknowledge that true security is not achieved by arms alone. Most of us still hope for a two-state solution. And we acknowledge that the policies and choices of the Israeli government can be legitimately questioned, and at times challenged.

We also despair at the extent to which the unique – and uniquely challenging – dynamics of the history and current structure of the conflict are so often overlooked. Jews are not uniquely powerful, globally or in a region in which they are surrounded by often-hostile Arab nations.

Too often, Antisemitism animates the assumptions and allegations being made and repeated, particularly in the public sphere, especially social media.

Together with our Muslim and Christian neighbors, we mourn the results of the violence, and we join those of goodwill throughout the world who are praying that the cease-fire holds and working for a peaceful resolution to this deep and challenging conflict.

- Israel Action Committee of the Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine

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