



**Israelis and Palestinians.
Two Peoples, One Future.**

**Sacramento Area Chapter
sacramento@jewishvoiceforpeace.org**

July 31, 2012

Dear Mayor Johnson and Sacramento City Council members:

We add our voice to those of others who have communicated concerns about the propriety of approving a sister-city relationship between Sacramento and Ashkelon, Israel, at this time.

We understand and appreciate that sister city connections are meant to reflect wishes of community groups to foster people-to-people relationships between residents of distant and often disparate places. We also recognize that many if not most regimes fall short of reflecting truly democratic principles or practices, and that should not necessarily rule them out for prospective sister city relationships. But a core principle is that all residents of a pair of sister cities should be able to participate in visits and other aspects of the relationship.

Unfortunately, under its current policy, Israel denies entry or makes it very difficult for many Palestinians residing in other countries, including Palestinian-Americans, who seek to visit friends or relatives in Israel or the occupied territories. This includes many of our Sacramento neighbors. Consequently, a sister-city relationship with Ashkelon would violate the December 15, 2009, City Council resolution declaring that any such future arrangement with an Israeli city “be inclusive of the citizens of Sacramento, including the diverse cultural and religious communities in the area.”

Limits on participation in this prospective sister city relationship imposed by the government of Israel are especially disturbing in light of the fact that recent ancestors of many of those now denied even tourist visas were forced from their homes in cities, towns and (now mostly destroyed) villages in Israel during and shortly after the 1948 fighting from which Israel emerged. Several thousand Palestinian residents of what became Ashkelon were confined in a “ghetto” (the term was used by Israeli critics) for nearly two years and then expelled to Gaza in 1950, long after truce agreements ended the fighting. They and others have not been permitted to return to their former homes.

Moreover, the current Israeli government’s escalating crackdown on dissent and civil liberties has resulted in denial of entry to hundreds of other concerned citizens from around the world who attempt to visit Israel/Palestine to learn firsthand about the conflict and perhaps to express, openly and by strictly peaceful means, their solidarity with Palestinians’ non-violent struggle against the 45-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This policy, too, has been exercised in the past year against at least one Sacramentan who was refused entry into Israel.

We do not state these concerns lightly. Many of us have close friends and family in Israel. Some of us have lived there and even hold Israeli citizenship. But we believe that to enter into a sister-city tie with Sacramento, a partner country should meet a minimal level of basic freedoms. At very least, our Sacramento neighbors with deep ties to the other country must not be barred from participating in mutual visits.

Thank you for giving this matter due consideration.

Sincerely,

David L. Mandel
For the Sacramento area chapter, Jewish Voice for Peace