



Sacramento Area Peace Action

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July 27, 2012

Sacramento Mayor and City Council
City Hall ,915 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Hon. Mayor Kevin Johnson and City Council Members:

A proposal has been made for Sacramento to enter into a sister city relationship with Ashkelon, Israel. As a human rights organization that for the past three decades has advocated adherence to international law and eschews discrimination, we do not think Ashkelon reflects the values that our city represents, nor of community members who live and work here.

Ashkelon, known for centuries as Al-Majdal, was one of many hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages that the Israeli military seized in 1948. Over 11,000 Palestinian residents of Ashkelon were forced to leave after being expelled from their centuries-old community. Thousands of these Palestinians and their descendants still await a return to their illegally-seized homes and businesses in Ashkelon, as required by United Nations Resolution 194. Also:

- Shikma Prison, located in Ashkelon, holds hundreds of West Bank and Gaza Palestinian prisoners – many are detainees who have never been charged with any offense – in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Amnesty International has documented torture of the Palestinian prisoners within Shikma Prison. Hunger strikes there have recently drawn international attention.
- The approximately 400 Palestinians (Muslims and Christians) who presently live in Ashkelon are treated as second-class citizens, denied the same rights, benefits, and access to land as Jewish Israelis. The unequal treatment of Palestinian citizens of Israel is well documented in the Inequality Report, March 2011, prepared by Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; it is available on their website, www.adalah.org.
- There are members of our Sacramento community, including Palestinian refugees who hold Israeli-issued IDs, who would not be allowed to visit Ashkelon. In addition, anyone of Palestinian heritage who is trying to visit family or their ancestral homeland is subject to extensive Israeli interrogation and not infrequent denial of entry.

When the City Council takes an action like formalizing a sister city relationship, its action reflects on our entire community. No other Sacramento sister city excludes Sacramento community members from visiting based solely on religion, ethnicity, or national origin. If you were to designate Ashkelon as a sister city, then Sacramento would be allowing discrimination against its own citizens.

Injustices, such as those in Ashkelon, have been substantially overcome throughout history. Slavery was ended in the U.S., apartheid was ended in South Africa, and segregation was outlawed in our country. We look forward to a not-too-distant day when human rights and international law are respected in Ashkelon and it is a city open to all in our Sacramento community. Then it could be an appropriate sister city for Sacramento.

For the Board of Directors,

Gary Meyer
Member of the Board,
Sacramento Area Peace Action, serving the Sacramento peace community since 1983