



Council on American-Islamic Relations

Greater Los Angeles Area Chapter

2180 W. Crescent Avenue, Suite F,

Anaheim, CA 92801

Tel (714) 776-1847 Fax (714) 776-8340 cairla.org

January 23, 2024

Congresswoman Michelle Steel

Cypress District Office

10805 Holder St., Ste 225

Cypress, CA 90630

Re: Islamophobic and Anti-Palestinian Remarks Made by Rep. Steel and Refusal to Meet with Palestinian Constituents

Dear Representative Michelle Steel,

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations Greater Los Angeles area (CAIR-LA) office, I am writing to express my deep disappointment and concerns regarding your egregious and dangerous mischaracterization of the events that transpired at your office on Jan. 18, 2024.

A group of five women, three of whom live in District 45, reported to our office that they came to visit your district office at approximately 10:30 am to discuss the urgent need to end the life-threatening humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The women stated that they carried small posters that read either "Free Palestine" or "Ceasefire Now." They rang the doorbell and knocked on the door several times, but no one answered. Given that it was normal business hours, and they could reportedly hear voices inside your office, they remained at the door asking to be let in to speak to someone, as you are an elected official who is supposed to hear and represent the interests of her constituents.

The group stated that all their previous attempts to reach your office and schedule a meeting via email or telephone went unanswered.



After pleading at the door for one and a half hours, the building manager reportedly approached the group of constituents and escorted them off the property. Rightfully frustrated that their duly elected congressional representative ignored them, the group stated that they pasted their posters to your office door with removable tape prior to leaving.

The blatant disregard for hearing from your constituents was bad enough, but then to slander them in your email newsletter was a shocking display of anti-Palestinian hate and Islamophobia.

In your message, you wrote:

“Yesterday, pro-Hamas protestors vandalized my district office. While no one was harmed, and I am grateful for federal and local law enforcement for their work to ensure the safety of my staff and visiting constituents. I want to be crystal clear about where I stand. More than 100 days after Hamas’ genocidal massacre, I remain committed to standing with our ally Israel in their effort to eradicate terror and recover the innocent hostages that remain in captivity.”

I will address each false allegation in your message individually:

1. The women who visited your office on Jan. 18 state that they did not express any sentiment except that they support an end to the indiscriminate bombing and military onslaught in Gaza and that Hamas was never once mentioned.

Conflating Palestinian solidarity with Hamas and terrorism is what has allowed the dehumanization of the entire Palestinian population and thereby makes the deaths of over 25,000 innocent Palestinian civilians, including 10,000 children, acceptable.

2. No alleged vandalism took place at your district office. The posters, attached with removable tape, reportedly caused no damage, as confirmed by the Cypress Police Department's decision not to file a vandalism incident.



An act of vandalism requires destruction or damage to public or private property, and no damage or destruction was reported to be caused by the actions of the five women. Characterizing the peaceful visitors as destructive and dangerous again shows how you use tired tropes to undermine the constituents attempting to meet you to try and have their voices heard on an issue that lives literally depend on.

3. The Pro-Palestinian visitors reportedly had no interaction with law enforcement on Jan. 18, 2024. All the pro-Palestinian visitors stated they left the premises prior to any police arriving, and that they left of their own will when asked by the building manager. No threats of any kind were allegedly made to your office staff.

4. Israel has repeatedly undermined the release of the hostages¹ and has repeatedly targeted Palestinian civilians in violation of international law.² Currently, 25 Palestinians are killed for every Israeli killed on Oct. 7—with an average rate of 250 Palestinians killed per day³. This rate is higher than any other major 21st Century conflict to date. Just today, Jan. 23, a U.N. center where 30,000 Palestinians are sheltering was struck, and six civilians were killed. 90% of the infrastructure in Gaza has been destroyed, and no functioning hospitals remain, yet your message did not mention a single atrocity committed by the state of Israel nor the staggering loss of innocent Palestinian lives. In its recently published annual report⁴, Human Rights Watch, an internationally recognized human rights organization, stated, "Israel's government responded [to Oct. 7 attacks] by cutting water and electricity to Gaza's 2.3 million civilians and blocking the entry of all but

¹ [Netanyahu touts 'initiative' to free hostages in Gaza as pressure mounts | CNN](#)

² [Israel's intensified attacks on Khan Younis kill dozens of people | NPR](#)

³ [Daily death rate in Gaza higher than any other major 21st Century conflict | Oxfam](#)

⁴ [Human Rights Watch Accuses Israel of War Crimes, Criticizes 'Selective Outrage' of Allies | VOA News](#)



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a trickle of fuel, food, and humanitarian aid—a form of collective punishment that is a war crime. The Israeli military ordered more than a million people in Gaza to evacuate their homes and bombarded densely populated areas with heavy weapons, killing thousands of civilians." Israel's actions have become so undeniable that it is being tried by the International Court of Justice. Your use of the term 'genocide' to describe one attack by Hamas while ignoring the current ongoing genocide and ethnic cleansing committed by Israel is completely tone-deaf.

The only truth to your statement is that after over 100 days of bloodshed in Gaza and no progress in the release of hostages, you remain committed to the continued killing of innocent Palestinian men, women, and children and putting the hostages at great risk of death, as we saw when three Israeli hostages were killed by Israeli soldiers⁵ who did not distinguish between combatants and hostages.

District 45 has one of the largest populations of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims in the entire state of California. Garden Grove is home to the oldest and largest mosque in southern California, the Islamic Center of Orange County, which alone serves 10,000 congregants in the area, and smaller mosques in Fountain Valley and Cypress serve a few thousand congregants each. Thousands of your own constituents have lost their own family and friends in Gaza through Israel's brutal military siege.

Despite this, you have ignored hundreds of calls and emails requesting a meeting with you to discuss this topic. It is a shame that you not only refuse to engage and meet with your constituents, but also misrepresent their civic engagement with your office and their frustration with their denial of their right to meet with your office as an act of vandalism in order to pander and solicit support from your anti-Palestinian supporters.

⁵[What we know about how 3 Israeli hostages were killed by the IDF](http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/23/what-we-know-about-how-3-israeli-hostages-were-killed-by-the-idf/) | CNN



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As a member of Congress, you have a responsibility to listen to and protect ALL your constituents, whether you agree with them or not. You have not only failed to protect your Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim constituents, you have fanned the flames of hate that has allowed 108 days of genocide to occur in Gaza, as well as the killing of Palestinians and their allies right here at home—the most recent incident being three Palestinian students in Vermont who were shot, and one permanently disabled, simply because they were wearing *keffiyeh*, the traditional Palestinian scarf, in public.

We demand a full public apology and retraction of your dangerous and deceitful message and a meeting with you personally to talk about the ongoing massacre in Gaza with your Palestinian constituents, who have thus far been completely ignored and insulted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hussam Ayloush".

Hussam Ayloush
Executive Director
CAIR-LA