

Testimony in Opposition to Ohio House Concurrent Resolution 10

Title: "To condemn the BDS movement and increasing incidents of anti-semitism"

By Douglas Kerr

Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118, November 1, 2017

Chair Louis W. Blessing III, and members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HCR-10.

I am retired pediatrician from University Hospitals of Cleveland. I was born in Beirut, Lebanon of American parents. In 1940, my family suddenly found us in Nazi territory and left Lebanon as refugees. My older brother later became President of the American University, and he was assassinated in 1984 by gunmen employed by the government of Iran. I am representing Interfaith Peace Builders-Ohio.

This resolution deliberately mischaracterizes differences of political opinion with "anti-semitism". Its purpose is to intimidate college and university students from speaking out against the injustices of the current Israeli government, thereby equating, by propaganda strategy, political criticism of the policies of the Israeli government as "anti-semitism". Growing up during World War II, I too condemn anti-semitism, which should be properly characterized as statements or actions in general against all Jews or Judaism, which was prevalent in European countries and the US before WW2, and I agree that this in a diminished form continues today.

Would you label criticism of our government, current or past, as anti-American? In fact, this is a time honored political process, founded in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Boycotts have a long history in our democracy, during the revolutionary war years and the civil rights movement.

To be direct, the Israeli government's policy is to denigrate and suppress Palestinian rights and economic opportunity, so as to make Palestinian land part of greater Israel. Do you know that the Israeli government or its occupation forces have -

- Taken over land within the West Bank which has been owned by Palestinians for hundreds or a thousand years, to build and expand Israeli only settlements?
- Built a 20 some foot high wall around Jerusalem and the settlements and the entire Green Line, mostly on Palestinian land with check points, which obstruct Palestinians from caring for their farm lands, traveling, access to Jerusalem for business, medical care, or worship at the holy sites? This barrier is called the Apartheid Wall or separation barrier; "apartheid" means separation.
- Do you know they control the aquifer under the West Bank and forbid Palestinians from digging wells, and instead, they sell limited water to the Palestinian residents?
- Require permits for home improvements or additions to Palestinian homes which are very rarely granted. If the owners go ahead and implement these improvements, they demolish the homes and charge the owner for the costs of demolition of their own home?
- Do you know they have blocked the roads to certain Palestinian rural villages, preventing access to the highways?
- Destroyed well established Palestinian orchards, claiming appropriation of the land without legal basis

- Regularly arrest and incarcerate many Palestinian children, and keep children and adults in Israeli prisons for long periods without charges as “administrative detention”?
- Do you know that they have driven Palestinian farmers by these policies off their land into urban enclaves where they are not able to support themselves or families?
- Confined two million Palestinian residents of Gaza in the world’s largest prison surrounded by Israeli walls and naval blockades, and Gaza has not recovered after destruction from the last Israeli massive bombardment, and remain in a human disaster condition?

I have witnessed all these actions on 5 trips to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories over the past 10 years.

Tomorrow is the centennial of a Jewish homeland in Palestine promised by Great Britain’s foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, when the British army defeated the Ottoman Empire and occupied Palestine. The clause that is mostly forgotten was the statement that “...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” In 1947, the United Nations, granted establishment of Israel and an Arab state by international law. Despite numerous “Peace” negotiations over the past 70 years, a separate state of Palestine has not been established. Prominent Israeli government leaders have publically declared in the recent years that there will be no Palestinian state in the occupied territories. That is the reason for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign by a wide Palestinian coalition, to support Palestinian political freedom, human rights, and economic viability.

We know why this resolution was introduced to the Ohio House. It originates from the well funded Israel lobby. They are concerned about the successes of the BDS movement and the growing movement of young people and students who criticize the Israeli government policies for their injustices to the Palestinians. Many of these campus movements are led by Jewish Americans, who are becoming increasingly disenchanted by propaganda and behavior of the Israeli government, which is antithetical to core Jewish values.

Don’t justify HCR-10 with the term “anti-semitism”. It should be renamed “Unconstitutional propaganda resolution supported by funds from the Israel lobby”.

Thank you for listening to my opposition statement.