

Testimony in Opposition to Ohio H.C.R. 10
Title: “To Condemn Manifestations of Anti-Semitism”
Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee
By Douglas Kerr, MD (Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118, March, 21, 2018)

Chair Senator LaRose, Ranking Minority Member Senator Schiavoni and other members of the Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to H.C.R.10.

I am Douglas Kerr and was born in Beirut, Lebanon of American parents, who met in Turkey after World War I. They were rescuing Armenians from the Turkish genocide. This was the first genocide of the 20th century, and was a precursor to the Holocaust. In 1940, my family suddenly found ourselves in enemy territory following the Nazi invasion of France. We fled south from Lebanon to Palestine and Egypt on our way to the US. Decades later my older brother, Malcolm, became President of the American University of Beirut. In 1984, he was assassinated by gunmen employed by the government of Iran, because he was a prominent American.

I condemn all forms of racism, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and hatred of people. Since my brother’s assassination, I have volunteered with Interfaith Peace Builders, which is supporting Israelis and Palestinians who are working for mutual justice and human rights.

House Continuing Resolution 10 deliberately mischaracterizes the term “anti-semitism” with differences of opinion. Its purpose is to intimidate college and university students from speaking out against the injustices of the Israeli government. By intentional propaganda strategy, it equates criticism of the policies of the Israeli government to “anti-semitism”. I too strongly condemn anti-semitism, which should be properly characterized as prejudice, statements, or actions in general against all or most Jews or Judaism, as was prevalent in European countries and in the US before WW2, and I agree that danger continues today within the United States.

Would you label criticism of our government, current or past, as “anti-American” or “racism”? Political criticism is a time honored process, founded in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Boycotts have a long history in our democracy, during the revolutionary war years, the civil rights movement, and other forms. Many Israelis openly criticize their own government’s leaders and policies, which is regarded as a privileged right.

The Israeli government’s stated purpose is to deny and suppress Palestinian rights and economic opportunity, so as to make Palestinian land part of greater Israel. The Likud Party, the party of Prime Minister Netanyahu (in his absence) voted again 3 months ago for a platform which states that Israel should annex “liberated Judea and Samaria”, which means the settlements and most of the West Bank. At least they declare their purpose publically of ending the two state solution!

Do you know that for more than 50 years the Israeli government and its military occupation forces have:

- Taken over land within the West Bank which has been owned by Palestinians for millennia, to build and expand Israeli only settlements?
- Driven Palestinian farmers off their land into urban enclaves where they are barely able to support themselves or families?
- Do you know, they have built a 20 some foot high wall around Jerusalem and the settlements weaving in and out of mostly 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 by some the “Apartheid Wall”, and by others the “Separation Barrier”; “apartheid” means “separation”.

- Do you know that Israel controls the aquifer under the West Bank and forbids Palestinians from digging wells, and sells limited water to the Palestinian residents? They provide Israeli settlements a generous supply of water for swimming pools and green laws in this dry land.
- Do you know the military occupation requires permits for improvements or additions to Palestinian homes? Permits are rarely granted. If the owner implements these improvements, their home will be demolished. The owner is then charged for the costs of demolition.
- Do you know they block roads to Palestinian villages and destroy orchards and farmland, including ancient olive trees? They appropriate land without a legal basis.
- They routinely arrest and incarcerate Palestinian children, and keep children and adults in Israeli prisons for many months or years without charges? You must have heard about Ahd Tamini, age 16, who was videotaped as she slapped an Israeli soldier on her family’s property soon after her cousin was shot in the head by another soldier. The strong Israeli soldier did not flinch. The slap was a form of resistance to the military occupation. After the video went viral, the IDF forces came back and arrested Ahd in the middle of the night. She has now spent 3 months in jail.
- Do you know that Israel has confined two million Palestinian residents of Gaza in the world’s largest prison surrounded by walls and naval blockades? Gaza has not recovered after destruction from the last Israeli massive bombardment and remains in a human disaster condition.

I have witnessed most of these actions on 5 trips to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in the past 10 years.

Prominent Israeli government leaders have publically declared that there will not be a Palestinian state in the occupied territories. They have not declared that the military occupation will end. That is the reason for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign by a wide Palestinian coalition, to support non-violently Palestinian freedom, human rights, and economic viability. After President Trump declared moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the Israeli Knesset passed a law declaring that Arab residents of Jerusalem would not be gain the right to vote. What kind of democracy is that?

We know why this resolution was introduced to the Ohio House. It originates and is supported by the well funded, pro-Israel government US lobby. The Israeli government is concerned about the successes of the BDS international movement. They are worried about the growing movement of young Americans and students who criticize the Israeli government for injustices to Palestinians. Many of these campus movements are led by Jewish Americans, who are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the propaganda and behavior of the Israeli government. This is antithetical to core Jewish values. A respected senior member of the Israeli press, Gideon Levy, has declared that he favors BDS as a way to pressure the Israeli government to recognize Palestinian human rights and justice.

In summary, H.C.R.10 confuses the term “anti-semitism” with criticism of injustices inflicted on Palestinians by the government of Israel. Free speech is protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution. You, as Ohio senators, should be defending core American justice values, instead of being loyal to a foreign government who perpetrates injustice and false propoganda cover. If you vote in favor of this resolution, should we call you anti-American?

Thank you for listening to my opposition statement.