

I have traveled to Israel and to the West bank. I was not allowed to go to Gaza. In 2008 I was in the Negev when what is now called the Gaza War started and the rockets from Gaza reached Be'er Sheva where I was staying. I had never heard air raid sirens before and will never forget the sounds. I will also never forget climbing to the top of a hill and seeing the a plume of smoke on the horizon. It looked like there was a volcano rising up from the Gaza strip. I learned the next day that the Israeli army had destroyed a hospital. In the next three weeks over 46,000 homes were destroyed in Gaza, making more than 100,000 people homeless. Although terrifying, the rockets from Gaza did not level buildings.

I believe that everywhere in the world, Jews should belong and should be safe. Israel did not feel safe in 2008. Fear was woven deep into the fabric of every day existence. How could anyone argue that Israel is safer now? After 16 more years of military aid from the US and thousands more bombs dropped, I argue that the Jewish people do not have a safer homeland. The US supported, Zionist strategy to create a safe homeland for the Jewish people has failed. It failed in 1948. It is still failing and will continue to because it is founded on oppression and a continuing denial of the right of the Palestinian people to exist. Real safety does not grow from guns, checkpoints, walls and a police state.

If S.B. 297 were law right now, my sentiments expressed above would instantly be classifiable as "antisemitic" under the IHRA definition. The result will be to silence necessary conversations about atrocities committed by the government and military of Israel. It will distract from the actual and very urgent work of dismantling antisemitism. These conversations are the only path towards real peace. Under the censorship proposed in S.B. 297, everybody loses. I urge you to reject this proposal.