



PRESS RELEASE

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Silent Betrayal: Austin Mayor's Failure to Stand by Hate Crime Victim and His Community

We, the undersigned, condemn Austin Mayor Kirk Watson's recent response to the confirmed local hate crime against Zacharia Doar, a 23-year-old Palestinian American father who was stabbed in the chest after attending a rally for Palestinian human rights. Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims in Austin have lived in fear over the past four months from an unprecedented surge in hate, censorship, and school and workplace discrimination. At the same time, they are suffering unimaginable pain from seeing a genocide unfold against their brethren. In this context, Mayor Watson's lack of compassion and empathy for the victim and these communities in Austin, as well as his refusal to meet with these community leaders, was particularly deplorable.

Mayor Watson waited for days to issue a statement that failed even to mention Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, or Islamophobia in a meaningful way. Instead, the statement warns those angered or frightened by the stabbing not act out and "grow hate" themselves and abruptly shifts to a mention of "the Oct. 7 terror attacks and the suffering caused by them, suffering that continues." This is within the context of the murder of nearly 30,000 Palestinians, a 178% increase in Islamophobic and Anti-Arab incidents in this country, and the aggravated assault on a Palestinian American activist in Austin on Sunday, February 4.

The same "love, support, protection and humanity" Mayor Watson rightfully offered to our Jewish community "against the growing anti-Semitism we see" in a statement made quickly on Oct. 8 is glaringly absent for our Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim neighbors, family and friends.

Instead of simply offering compassion to Zacharia and his family, including his five-month-old baby, Mayor Watson's main request in his statement is to advance his own political agenda and dismiss the primary demand of the victim's father - calling for a ceasefire. While Mayor Watson claims that a local ceasefire resolution "will not realistically end the violence on the other side of the globe," he had no issues taking a public stance on the conflict when he joined Governor Greg Abbott at a "We Stand with Israel" event on October 9th.



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On the same day he issued his statement, the Mayor abruptly canceled a previously scheduled meeting with representatives from the Austin for Palestine Coalition, including Palestinian American, Arab, Muslim, and Jewish leaders, claiming that “there is not a need” for the meeting. Despite the fact he is unwilling to have a meaningful conversation about a ceasefire resolution, it was imperative for him to meet and support this community after the hate crime that occurred just four days prior.

Finally, Mayor Watson’s recent post, titled “Combatting All Hate,” not only deploys the “All Lives Matter” tactic of dismissing hate targeting people of color but offers the “thoughts and prayers” that politicians often offer when they have no intent on taking action.

His ominous warnings of division over a ceasefire resolution only reinforces a false binary that further pits communities against one another. In reality, the community leaders calling for a city ceasefire resolution represent a diverse coalition of advocates comprised of Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, Black, Latine, and Asian American Austinites.

The failures of Mayor Watson and the majority of his city council colleagues to promptly address hate crimes is dismissive, disingenuous, and dehumanizing towards Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim communities. Their refusal to support a ceasefire resolution plunges our communities into a state of fear for both ourselves and our children. Their refusal to speak out amplifies the persistence of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression.

As Austin community members who support the struggle for racial justice and civil rights, both in our community and around the world, we strongly condemn Mayor Watson’s statement, the bias he has shown against Palestinians, Arab, and Muslim communities, and his dismissal of local organizing for a ceasefire.

