



PARTICIPANTS

Commission Members Present:

Hamadi Jackson, Chair; Kelsey Murray, Vice Chair; Greg Azure; Laura Fouts; Joaquin Lara Midkiff; Lisa Novak; Cathy Ostrand-Ponsioen; Kaitlin Strathdee

Guests Present:

Sela; Jodi H.; Jessenya Salinas; Kaire Downin; Enam; Jacob P.; Maxine A.; Janty Yaquob; Margaret Stephens; Marlene Eichner; Steve Eichner; Farah Abuelkhair; Alex Hitchen; Finn Mac Quarrie; Logan Stewart; Masva Vatia; Clifford; Lynelle Wilcox; and others unnamed.

Staff Present:

Gretchen Bennett

1. Call to Order, Welcome and Review of Agenda

Chair Jackson welcomed the group and noted we will forego introductions in the interest of time. The You Tube channel transmission/recording was noted. Chair Jackson noted there will be an additional meeting next week and today and next week are opportunities for voices to be heard. He noted the Commission would like time to talk as a Commission, and the 7 – 8 pm time block will be reserved for this. He requested that all enter this discussion with respect for all to have the opportunity to express their voice and view.

2. Public Comment

The Commission noted that public comment time amount is limited today; a show of hands indicated five people wished to provide comment and in addition Gretchen received one comment by phone to read aloud.

Public Comment related to Gaza received from: Michael Slater (via Gretchen reading remarks from telephone call); Sela; Jodi H. (who also included a land acknowledgement); Jessenya Salinas; Kaire Downin; Enam. Chair Jackson asked if anyone else who had not already provided public comment today wished to speak. Four people expressed interest. The Commission discussed and agreed to limit to people who have not yet provided comment (such as at a previous meeting). Two additional people provided comment: Clifford, and Steve Eichner. Chair Jackson thanked everyone for their courage and their comments, sharing he has strong feelings on the topic, having watched the subject for decades and having family who immigrated to Israel, noting his heart has been hurting. He emphasized the opportunity for all to speak and noted that there are people observing Passover who cannot be here this evening and he and the Commission wants to have their voices added, and the Commission themselves needs to

have time to discuss. He said he must be fair and give people time to discuss, and so it is not that he does not want to act, but that it is important to hold additional time.

3. Action and/or Discussion Items: Statement related to cease fire in Gaza

Vice Chair Murray asked for a recap of the motion made at the last meeting, which was: the HRC commit that the work coming out of the commission will include a statement for an immediate and permanent cease fire; that Israel (leadership) are in violation of international law; and that what is happening is genocide, as part of, but not the full, recommendation of the Commission.

Commissioner Lara Midkiff spoke to the request for advice on the subject. He noted holding a third meeting (next week) is not intended to stall but to respond to requests for people to participate who are not able to given Passover observance this week. He expressed his intent that the statement could be finalized next week.

Commissioner Ostrand-Ponsioen asked when this topic would be on the City Council agenda. Gretchen replied there is not a date selected already, noting the decision will be made by the city leadership and that there are also a number of other agenda items pressing as well.

Vice Chair Murray thanked Commissioner Novak for drafting a statement for consideration. Two versions were provided. Commissioner Novak indicated she welcomes edits. Several expressed support for the empathetically written version.

Commissioner Lara Midkiff noted the group had not discussed if they believe the form of the statement should be a proclamation or resolution. He noted the Mayor indicating interest in a statement shared by the Polk County Democrats and read the statement. He indicated this is not what he would recommend.

Chair Jackson noted the group can say what it needs to say, and then the Mayor can choose to use it or go in a different direction. Discussion ensued about a proclamation and resolution. Commissioner Novak noted the expediency of a proclamation and the group discussed perhaps both can be recommended.

Commissioner Fouts spoke to the commitment to residents of Salem. She noted rising hate crimes against Islamic people and rising antisemitism and expressed grave concern over it all. Discussion ensued about declaring all life precious and denouncement of atrocities and taking care to hear the voice of all the residents of Salem.

Commissioner Azure spoke of his experience as a person whose people are Native American and his people feeling and knowing colonization and trauma. He said he cannot water down the word genocide. He said he wants to stand ground and be fair to everybody, saying our purpose as HRC is to make the bold statement. He noted this cannot be a political football but about humanity as we are all related.

Commissioner Strathdee asked if a statement is enough or is it performative. She notes if it can protect people from hate crime it is enough. If the words are not meaningful, is it enough? She noted Senator Merkley will be in town on Friday which is another opportunity to influence on the topic. She noted language is important and impactful, thanking Chair Jackson for leading the conversation respectfully. She wants to have opportunity for people observing Passover to give input and agrees with using strong language in a statement.

The group noted a larger room is needed for the next meeting.

Vice Chair Murray said she would be disappointed to recommend the example statement that did not contain mention of U.S. money and genocide. She noted that we are not giving money to Hamas and so that is why we are focusing where we are.

Discussion continued about a statement being a minimum, discussions of scope, the number of days it has been since October, the number of people who have died, and more.

Commissioner Lara Midkiff discussed the precondition to genocide is intent. He spoke of mass graves being discovered. He noted resolutions in Seattle and Eugene.

Additional discussion and comments included naming the Biden Harris administration, asking the federal delegation to act, asking for humanitarian aid for necessities, and naming Oregon and Salem for taxes that is invested here. Discussion continued about ending military aid to Israel and supporting a free and liberated Palestine.

Gretchen spoke of the importance of people with diverse voices being comfortable to share those, and when a majority view is prevalent, cautions at that place and wanting to check and help anyone with additional or different perspectives to be heard.

Commissioner Ostrand Ponsioen noted we have heard from the community that certain phrases might be harmful. She quoted Chapter 8 of the Salem Revised Code and wanted to keep the Commission's role and purpose in mind and to move ahead carefully and thoughtfully.

Chair Jackson said to reach him directly if you don't feel heard and if you want to say something.

Commissioner Lara Midkiff asked if additional phrases stand out to Commissioners. Vice Chair Murray noted concern with a systemic and deliberate attempt to erase the Palestinian people. Commissioner Azure noted ground has been broken in other cities and we can use the example statements as examples. Commissioner Fouts spoke to a preference toward Seattle's statement as a base to work from. She wants to particularly stand against acts of hate. Commissioner Ostrand Ponsioen wants to bring it back to the people of Salem. The group agreed, noting the dollar amount spent by Salemites in taxes.

Minutes respectfully presented by staff Gretchen Bennett.