



March 12, 2024

To: Mayor Maria Pacheco and Members of the Kerman City Council:

Gary Yep, District 1
Jennifer Coleman, District 2
Ismael Herrera, District 3
Bill Nijjer, District 4
Josie Camacho, City Clerk
John Jansons, City Manager

From: Jewish Community Relations Committee of the
The Jewish Federation of Central California

Jacques Benninga, Committee Chair *Jacques S. Benninga*

Committee Members:

Murray Farber, Sean Boyd, Judy Haber, Lee Horwitz, Hilary Levine, Paul
Pierce, Carole Press
Esti Barak, President, Jewish Federation of Central California

Re: Please Do Not Support a Ceasefire Resolution

Dear Mayor Pacheco and Members of the Kerman City Council,

We write this letter to urge the Kerman City Council not to engage in discussion of, or action towards, a ceasefire resolution in the war between Hamas and Israel at its March 13 meeting. Please read this letter into the record of the March 13, 2024 Council meeting.

We are prompted to write this letter after viewing the sometimes unruly, one-sided public comment sessions at other local city council meetings. We have followed the course of the war in Gaza closely since October 7, 2023, and view any action taken by local councils to be based on incomplete background influenced and by emotional outbursts from a small portion of constituents. Local city councils, reasonably, are simply not well equipped to understand the full complexity of the situation and will have no sway on its resolution.

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A bit of background: The unprovoked attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, “began early on the morning..., when thousands of Hamas-led terrorists burst through the border with Israel, slaughtering some 1,200 people, most of them civilians, seizing 253 hostages amid scenes of horrific violence, mutilation, sexual violence...” and wounding thousands more (Against All Evidence, Hamas Says it Morally, Religiously Opposes Harming, Women, Kids, *Times of Israel*, Jan 24, 2024). This was the deadliest attack on Israel since 1973 and marked the largest number of Jews killed on a single day since the Holocaust. As a result of these events, Israel declared war on Gaza.

The history. Israel totally evacuated from Gaza in 2005, withdrawing every soldier, settler, and settlement. Hamas took full control over that territory after a bloody war with the Palestinian Authority (not with Israel). With that action, Hamas, a recognized terrorist organization that refused to disarm its armed wing or revise elements of its charter that sought the destruction of the state of Israel, had secured full authority over Gaza. Over the subsequent years, Hamas invested a huge proportion of the foreign aid it received, at the expense of its own citizens, into building an army and digging an extensive tunnel infrastructure below the surface of the Gaza Strip (e.g., What is Hamas? *Cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hamas*, October 31, 2023).

The tunnels are used by Hamas soldiers to ambush the enemy and carry out counter-offensive operations, disregarding any harm to its own civilian population. Much of Hamas's infrastructure is built in the heart of crowded civilian areas in the Gaza Strip, which means that military targets, including command and control centers, weapons production, weapons depots, military infrastructure, shafts for terrorist tunnels and combat management centers are in civilian neighborhoods (https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-media-savvy-murderers-hamas-livestream-atrocities-oct-7-exploit-gaza-civilians-1efe5a63?mod=Searchresults_pos2&page=1) . Many are in or under hospitals, and it was recently discovered that a major Hamas command and control center was built directly below the UN's own UNRWA's Gaza headquarters (e.g., <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-had-command-tunnel-under-un-gaza-hq-israeli-military-says-2024-02-10/>).

The situation is more complicated by Hizballah shelling rockets from Lebanon in the north, causing over 100,000 Israelis to have evacuated their homes, and by the Houthi, an Islamic insurgent group in Yemen, shelling ships in the Suez Canal. Since November, the Iran-backed Houthis have launched numerous attacks on vessels in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, which the group says are aimed at ships with links to Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. American service members were killed and dozens more injured in an unmanned aerial drone attack on a base in Jordan by, according to President Biden, "radical Iran-backed militant groups operating in Syria and Iraq" sponsored by Iran. All this and more has been widely reported and is common knowledge.

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The damage within Gaza has been great. Gaza's Health Ministry reports over 30,000 dead. This number includes over 13,000 Gazan militants, the Hamas soldiers (IDF says 12,000 Hamas fighters killed in Gaza War, *Times of Israel*, February 20, 2024). Although we condemn Hamas for exposing its own citizens as collateral, we mourn each civilian death. Hamas, knowing the damage it has encouraged to be perpetuated against its own citizens for its ideological cause, should surrender, and release the still-held Israeli hostages. That would stop the war immediately.

Instead, Ghazi Hamad, a senior member of Hamas, in a broadcast publicly shown on YouTube, praised the attack on Israel on October 7, and promised that Hamas would repeat such attacks many times in the future until it destroyed Israel. He was quoted as stating, "Israel is a country that has no place on our land. We must remove it because it constitutes a security, military, and political catastrophe to the Arab and Islamic nation. We are not ashamed to say this" (Hamas official threatens to repeat October 7 attacks until Israel is annihilated, *YouTube*).

For Israel, this war is existential. Hamas seeks to destroy Israel, "from the river to the sea".

Our United States government has endorsed Israel's right to defend herself, and negotiations for a ceasefire are ongoing (Biden says he expects ceasefire within a week, *New York Times*, February 27, 2024). Let our government and the negotiators do their work. Israel has since agreed to a temporary ceasefire; Hamas has not.

It is our belief that local agencies are ill-equipped to deal with the intricacies of the ongoing negotiations and have no sway over them. Furthermore, if Kerman decides to continue with this resolution, why now? Why this issue? Why also not condemn Russia for forcibly abducting and transferring almost 20 thousand Ukrainian children to areas under its control, assigning them Russian citizenship, forcibly adopting them into Russian families, and creating obstacles for their reunification with their parents? Why not condemn China for imprisoning more than one million Uyghurs, a mostly Muslim group, and subjecting those Uyghurs not detained to intense surveillance, religious restrictions, forced labor, and forced sterilization? Why does Kerman singularly focus on this issue?

We ask you, therefore, not to take any action on this issue, but rather to continue the work of the Kerman City Council to improve the lives of the citizens of Kerman and to encourage them all to get along. Peace is built up from the local level. Such a vision would be inclusive. But an official endorsement by Kerman's City Council for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza now would be incomplete and divisive.

Thank you.

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