

**To: Council**

**Date: 27 November 2023**

**Report of: Head of Law and Governance**

**Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses from Cabinet Members**

## **Introduction**

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. This is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council
3. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address from Professor Nick Maynard
2. Address from Rachel Schiller
3. Address from Maryam Ahmed
4. Address from Chaka Artwell – Ethnic Traders and Shoppers of Oxford Cowley Road

## **Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda**

### **1. Address from Professor Nick Maynard**

I am a Consultant Surgeon in Oxford and have been travelling to Gaza for nearly 15 years to teach medical students and more recently to teach and carry out major cancer surgery in Gazan hospitals. Gaza has been occupied by Israel since 1967 and has been blockaded for 16 years. What this means is that Gaza is a large prison, effectively closed off from the outside world with the vast majority of the population imprisoned and unable to ever leave the country. Gaza with its population of >2.2 million, is the

most densely populated country on earth. By any definition of apartheid, the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are living under an Apartheid system.

In my multiple visits, there has never been an occasion when I have not witnessed bombardments from the IDF. The economy is largely disabled by Israeli control, there is extreme poverty and unemployment, and permanent food, water, and fuel insecurity. The frequent power cuts mean that often the sanitation plants cannot work leading to poor water quality and increased risks of infectious diseases. There is a chronic shortage of drugs, medicines, and surgical equipment. After the 2014 military assault by Israel on Gaza when over 2000 Palestinians were killed, it is estimated that nearly 400 000 children were in need of psycho-social aid to deal with mental health problems caused by war trauma.

This is essential background to current events.

On October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas militants inflicted a horrific attack on Israel, killing more than 1200 people and abducting more than 200 Israeli citizens.

Since October 7<sup>th</sup> the Israeli retaliation has led to a humanitarian catastrophe. As of 20<sup>th</sup> November, in 6 weeks 11 078 Gazans have been killed, 4506 children have been killed, 1.6 million Gazan citizens have been displaced from their homes and more than 200 healthcare workers have been killed. Water, food, and electricity have been cut off. To provide some context, in the 18 months since Russia invaded Ukraine, the UN estimates that 9701 Ukrainian civilians have been killed. The rate of killing in Gaza is 15 times greater than that in Ukraine.

I and my colleagues have been talking to our medical friends in Gaza daily. They are in a living hell. I will read out some of their quotes to me:

- *we don't want the aid coming in – it is useless without a ceasefire. All we want is a ceasefire*
- *we want to be treated as humans*
- *we have been deserted by the rest of the world*
- *I am calling from Gaza, this could be the last message I send. The situation is beyond description, Israeli forces have bombed many Gaza hospitals, and still want to bomb hospitals more. Many of my colleague doctors and health care workers have been killed, also we are being starved, food and water are decreasing in amount, civilians are killed in the hundreds each day in cold blood. We call upon the British government to force the Israelis to ceasefire now, lift the siege on Gaza, and let us live and breathe (young doctor I taught as a medical student)*

When I mentioned the proposed humanitarian pause to one of my friends, this is the response I got:

- *do they just want to give us food and water before they kill us*

The Gazan people are a beautiful, beautiful people. My wife and I have a Gazan daughter who managed to leave Gaza 6 years ago, and to whom we have tried to be adoptive parents in the absence of her real parents who are stuck in Gaza. Her cousins, including small children, have been killed but so far miraculously her immediate family are alive. She goes days without talking to them, not knowing whether they are dead or alive. They are my family too, I have eaten with them in their home in Gaza, I have laughed and cried with them. I have hugged and kissed and played with their small children.

I would also like to tell you about Maisara. Maisara was a doctor in Gaza, recently married, his wife pregnant with their first child. I have eaten with his family in Gaza. He stayed in my home in Oxford, ate with my family. He was killed the other day by an Israeli bomb, with his parents and two sisters. His brothers were searching in the rubble for him, when another bomb killed them. His wife and unborn baby are the only surviving members of the family.

Aid going into Gaza cannot help unless there is a ceasefire to allow full access for this humanitarian aid. Medical Aid for Palestinians, a UK based charity, with whom I travel into Gaza, has a list of volunteer medics and nurses, including some of us from Oxford, who will go into Gaza with other agencies such as WHO, MSF and ICRC as part of first category 1 wave.

In order for this to happen there must be an immediate ceasefire and I stand here today to request in the strongest possible terms that the Council Leader writes to Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer and Annaliese Dodds demanding they call for an immediate ceasefire.

## 2. Address from Rachel Schiller

My name is Rachel, I am an Israeli-British citizen living in Abingdon.

I came here today to share my view in the hope that it will help you make up your own mind about the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

As an Israeli I suffer.

I constantly worry for my family and friends, and grief for the many broken families. I grief with my husband's family, who lost loved ones during last month's massacre, and for Ofra Keidar, my husband's 70 years old relative, a grandmother, who is being kept as a hostage for over 50 days.

I am hunted by this old familiar fear day and night. A fear of terror. A fear that resides inside me since I can remember myself. A fear that affected every aspect of my life and made me raise my family away from my own country.

Like most people, all I want is to live my life in peace. Life brings with it enough obstacles in our private sphere - we don't need anything on top of that.

As someone sick of violence, I ask myself - are all military actions avoidable?

Hamas's actions - the massacre on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, wiping out whole villages, taking more than 200 civilian hostages, including children, women and elderly that are still in Gaza today, firing thousands and thousands of rockets that are still being shot every day indiscriminately on a civilian population in Israel. These actions lie so far outside what is 'acceptable', even in war, even in the middle east.

This left me, and many others in Israel, to believe that a military action is needed until the release of the hostages and the removal of Hamas – a recognized terrorist group - from ruling Gaza. A ceasefire means that Hamas lives to murder another day as they have publicly stated that they wish to carry out more genocide.

The sad reality is that this might be an horrendous conflict, but it is only one of many. To break this cycle, we must think about the long term, and as much as it sounds crazy in these days – we need to remain hopeful and act for peace. To live a quiet safe life without fear for civilians at both sides. Sometimes things get worse before they get better and for sake of our children's future, we must work to make a change.

Britain, with its rich history in this area and its current good diplomatic relationship with both sides, is in the right position to make a real, long-term, difference. Better than any other country. And it is Oxford, with its multi-cultural community, that shows us that our similarities are greater than our differences. You, our leaders in Oxford, have our support and power to end the suffering of all civilians and bring a lasting change. A ceasefire is not enough, we need peace. I urge you to adopt Councillor Susan Brown's motion for Peace and for a free two-state solution.

I wanted to close with a beautiful prayer that my friend, a devout Christian, sent me to help me with my worries –

Psalm 122

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may they prosper who love you.

May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.

For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, 'May peace be within you'.

### 3. Address from Maryam Ahmed

Dear Councillors,

My name is Maryam Ahmed, I am representative of helptheworldoxford a Muslim female led youth group that focuses on activism and community projects. I am speaking here today to urgently appeal for a ceasefire in Gaza. As of today 13300 people have been killed in Gaza. Most of these being women and children.

As of now, according to Amnesty International Israel has stopped vital access to services within the Gaza strip. This under the Geneva convention Article 33 constitutes as collective punishment of citizens. Which under international law is a war crime.

Women in Gaza are having c-sections without anaesthetic, they are having several layers of tissue cut through without pain relief. Women are having to chemically suppress their periods as well risk infertility if they are with child. This is a cruel and inhumane form of period poverty.

Why is that the Palestinian people must publicly show their pain and suffering for us to listen. Genocide scholars around the world comment that states can neutralise their actions and war crime by dehumanising populations and establishing them as the "other." Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted that "This is a struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle." A dangerous and harmful rhetoric that children can be differentiated, and children can be dehumanised.

I am distraught and disheartened by the vote against a ceasefire. Democracy must be citizen-led and right now I as well many other members of the public feel disheartened and appalled at the lack of intervention by the U.K as well as the international community. I appeal to your humanity. So many times we have said "never again" and yet here we are.

I am frustrated that rather than taking action to stop the killings of innocent civilians we are debating the meanings of trivial terms.

Oxford a city that prides itself as the hub of free thought, intellectualism, and academia. It is an injustice to stay silent whilst the Palestinian people are suffering. It is an injustice to pay lip service to decolonial theories, and ideas whilst allowing the extermination of a population.

As a Muslim female, I feel targeted, belittled, and I have had my livelihood put on the line because I am standing up against genocide. I am disillusioned by the actions of this government to vote against a ceasefire. This is a stark reminder for the BAME community in the U.K that our lives are not precious, and the human rights are hierarchal. To vote against a ceasefire, is to vote against peace. A vote against ceasefire is to allow the indiscriminate bombing of a civilian population.

We have the power to do something, we have the power to stop the massacre of innocent civilians and by staying silent each one of us is complicit.

#### **4. Address from Chaka Artwell – Ethnic Traders and Shoppers of Oxford Cowley Road**

Would Oxford City Council's Elected Councillors, and Executive Officers, using the auspices and authority of Oxford Council's Ethnic Disparity Policy, assist the Ethnic Traders and shoppers of Oxford Cowley Road, who have been disproportionately harmed by the implementation of the County Council's anti-car, and East Oxford Road block policies?

As Oxford City Council is aware, Cowley Road's Ethnic Traders and Shoppers, of Asian, Arabic, and African-heritage, have been disproportionately disadvantaged, and harmed by the Liberal, Labour, and Green influenced County Council's Road block policies in Oxford East: policies that has made purchasing ethnic foods on the Cowley Road extremely difficult for Oxford's Ethnic population.

The disproportional impact on Oxford's Ethnic Traders and shoppers; ethnic shoppers who specifically purchase from Cowley Road's ethnic range of halal foods; spices and clothing, must be addressed and corrected by Oxford City's Elected Councillors, and Executive Officers.

If the County Council's 15-minute neighbourhood policies are implemented, the disparity against Ethnic Traders and Shoppers will be racially unjust, skin-colour discriminatory, and financially ruinous for Cowley Road's Ethnic Traders.