

**From:** Paul Kolin <pkolin@bloomfield.org>  
**Sent:** 3/3/2023 6:37:2 AM  
**To:** "Jonathan VnGeme t" <jvngame t@bloomfield.org>, "Megan Hill" <mhill@bloomfield.org>  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Fwd: Meeting on the "controversy" surrounding my comments at BHHS's "Diversity" Assembly

I want this as part of the investigation

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** Paul Kolin <pkolin@bloomfield.org>  
**Date:** Fri, Mar 31, 2023 at 3:36 AM  
**Subject:** Re: My statement on the "controversy" surrounding my comments at BHHS's "Diversity" Assembly  
**To:** Patrick Watson <pwatson@bloomfield.org>  
**Cc:** Keith McDonald <kmcdonald@bloomfield.org>, Michelle Southward <msouthward@bloomfield.org>, Siva Kumar <skumar@bloomfield.org>

HERE IS THE ACCOUNT FROM THE SPEAKER- ARE WE SAYING THAT THE SPEAKER IS NOT TELLING THE TRUTH

LOOK AT POINT 1 AND 4

From Huwaida

1 Received invite to speak from one of the organizers questioned whether my story would fit with the theme of the assembly because I didn't deal with much discrimination in school said I could talk about the violence of racism not with what I faced in school but what I've witnessed in my work including the dehumanization in Palestine (which can be tied to white nationalist violence here) Said I could start with my story and what took me to Palestine

2 Was told that my story fits and they would love to have me  
\*\*\* want to make sure that we don't throw the organizers (as a group or specifically the one who invited me under bus)

3 Sent the organizers a short bio which mentioned co-founding SM organizing the Freedom Flotilla which was lethally attacked by Israeli forces and doing a "Freedom Ride" attempting to ride Israeli settler busses for which I was arrested

4 Quick call last week with some of the organizers and the Asst Principal Jessica Lupone primarily to go over logistics and answer any questions Took only about 15 minutes

5 Day of the event I didn't have anything scripted because I was speaking from personal experience None of the speakers did (have anything scripted) and we each gave a little different speech each time we presented

6 In my first speech to the Sophomores mentioned that one of the volunteers with SM a 23 year old college student went to Gaza asked if students had heard about Gaza explained that it's a strip of land about the size of metro Detroit in which 2 million people live and are trapped Everything that goes in and out of Gaza is controlled by Israel explained that Rachel used to write letters home to her mother to explain what she was witnessing and read a few lines from one of her letters in that letter Rachel wrote that she feels she's witnessing a genocide and that we all should drop what we're doing and devote our lives to making it stop Two weeks after she wrote that letter to her mom she was run over by an Israeli driven bulldozer and killed while she was trying to stop the demolition of a Palestinian home Today marks the 20th anniversary of her death

7 After the first assembly the principal and asst principal asked if they could talk to me They said that they heard some rumblings among some students and that my talk might have come across as too political They said that many families have ties to and relatives in Israel responded that it shouldn't matter What Israel is doing is a crime against humanity and we shouldn't shy away from talking about what's happening to Palestinians because it might make some uncomfortable They asked if I could just focus more on personal experience because they want me to be "well received" by the students I agreed

8 In talks 2-4 I didn't mention Gaza or Rachel talked about confounding the SM bringing people from around the world including many Jews to stand with Palestinians in their struggle for freedom stressed that the issue was not Jews against Palestinians but rather freedom vs occupation and oppression

9 Told students that talking about Palestinian rights gets one labeled as antisemitic or terrorist or self-hating Jew and that Palestinians have been so vilified that talking about their right to live free is seen as controversial

10 Asked students to be conscientious and kind and always recognize that their fellow humans no matter their ethnic religious or other identity deserve the same rights they want for themselves And if they did that they would do incredible things to make this world a better one for our children

On Fri, Mar 31, 2023 at 12:38 AM Patrick Watson <pwatson@bloomfield.org> wrote:

Hello,

Please see the response below to the question:

The speakers who presented didn't provide a script. The concern was the speaker deviated from the prompt which was, "what oppression or discrimination have you faced, and what could the people around you have done to make this better? If applicable, how has racism and ignorance affected you in high school?"

Best,  
Pat

On Thu, Mar 30, 2023 at 7:12 AM Michelle Southward <msouthward@bloomfield.org> wrote:

Good morning,

Could we follow up with Paul's request.

Michelle

On Mon, Mar 20, 2023 at 4:25 PM Paul Kolin <[pkolin@bloomfield.org](mailto:pkolin@bloomfield.org)> wrote:  
We keep saying the speaker deviated from the script, I want to see the script

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Huwaida Arraf** <[REDACTED]>  
Date: Mon, Mar 20, 2023 at 3:13 PM  
Subject: My statement on the "controversy" surrounding my comments at BHHS's "Diversity" Assembly  
To: [msouthward@bloomfield.org](mailto:msouthward@bloomfield.org) <[msouthward@bloomfield.org](mailto:msouthward@bloomfield.org)>, [skumar@bloomfield.org](mailto:skumar@bloomfield.org) <[skumar@bloomfield.org](mailto:skumar@bloomfield.org)>, [jvngemert@bloomfield.org](mailto:jvngemert@bloomfield.org) <[jvngemert@bloomfield.org](mailto:jvngemert@bloomfield.org)>, [pkolin@bloomfield.org](mailto:pkolin@bloomfield.org) <[pkolin@bloomfield.org](mailto:pkolin@bloomfield.org)>, [tfalah@bloomfield.org](mailto:tfalah@bloomfield.org) <[tfalah@bloomfield.org](mailto:tfalah@bloomfield.org)>, [mhill@bloomfield.org](mailto:mhill@bloomfield.org) <[mhill@bloomfield.org](mailto:mhill@bloomfield.org)>, [cnoble@bloomfield.org](mailto:cnoble@bloomfield.org) <[cnoble@bloomfield.org](mailto:cnoble@bloomfield.org)>

Dera Bloomfield Hills School Board,

It is my understanding that you are having a special meeting tonight. I imagine that it is to discuss the Bloomfield Hills High School "Diversity" Assembly last week. As the speaker at the center of the "controversy" who has been attacked, vilified, and defamed by certain special interest groups, and by the BH school administration, I want to share the following comments with you.

Sincerely,  
Huwaida Arraf  
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#### STATEMENT ON THE "CONTROVERSY" SURROUNDING MY COMMENTS AT BLOOMFIELD HILLS HIGH SCHOOL DIVERSITY ASSEMBLY

On March 4, 2023, I was one of five speakers invited by student organizers to speak at the Bloomfield Hills High School Diversity Assembly. I was invited specifically because of my history of campaigning for Palestinian human rights and I was asked by the student organizers to share some of my experiences.

The diversity assembly was divided into four separate assemblies, one for each grade, 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. In all the assemblies, I spoke about my parents leaving Palestine when my mother was pregnant with me because they wanted their children to grow up knowing freedom and having rights and opportunity, all of which are not available to Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation. I recounted that after graduating from the University of Michigan, I decided to move to Palestine to learn firsthand about the situation and with the hopes of helping to bring about change. I explained that I initially worked for a conflict resolution program that brought Israeli and Palestinian children together with the goal of breaking down stereotypes and building a new generation of leaders who would move the region toward peace. I told the students that, while it was wonderful to see young Israelis and Palestinians learn about each other and become the best of friends, this was not enough. We cannot suffice ourselves with having friends "on the other side." We have to do the work to dismantle the systems of oppression that create division and conflict as they degrade people based on their race, religion, or ethnicity. This is why, I explained, I left the conflict resolution program and co-founded the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), a Palestinian led, nonviolent resistance movement that has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The ISM called on people from all over the world to come stand with Palestinians in their struggle for freedom. I told the students that many of the people who came to volunteer with the ISM were Jewish, because what is happening in Palestine is not a conflict between Jews and Palestinians, but rather a struggle for freedom vs occupation and oppression.

In the first assembly, to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade class, I shared the words of a former colleague, an ISM volunteer who was not much older than the students when she came to work with us. 23 year old, Rachel Corrie, from Olympia, Washington. Rachel went to volunteer in Gaza. To give the students context, I explained that Gaza is a small strip of land, about the size of metro Detroit, where two million Palestinians live, unable to move. I explained that, for the past 5 years, Israel has had an illegal, crippling blockade on Gaza, meaning that everything that comes in or goes out of Gaza is directly or indirectly controlled by Israel. This is a fact.

I read an excerpt from an email that Rachel wrote to her mother explaining the horror that she felt at witnessing what was being done to the Palestinian people in Gaza. She wrote that she was scared and questioning her fundamental belief in the goodness of human nature. "This has to stop. I think it is a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this stop," she wrote. Two weeks after she wrote this email to her mother, Rachel Corrie was run over by an Israeli soldier driven Caterpillar D9 bulldozer and crushed to death. She was pleading with the soldier not to demolish the home of the Palestinian family she was staying with when he ran her over. March 6, 2023 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death. I ended by telling the students that each one of us, each one of them, has a role to play in shaping our future. What they say and do matters in their communities and, in our increasingly interconnected world, to people around the world. I implored them to be kind, be conscientious, and to look past identity to recognize that we are all human beings deserving of the same rights that they want for themselves. If they did that, they would make incredible strides in making this world a kinder, gentler place for my children and theirs.

Following the end of the first assembly, Principal Stroughter and Assistant Principal Lupone suggested to me that my comments may have been perceived by some students as being "too political." While it was disturbing to hear that talk about the conditions under which Palestinians live is considered "too political," I agreed not to specifically talk about Gaza and to focus on other personal experiences.

For the rest of the assemblies, I did not mention Gaza or Rachel. I even made a point to stress that many of our greatest allies in the struggle for Palestinian freedom are Jewish and that my husband is from a Jewish family so as not to leave any doubt that my comments were not to be taken as an attack on Jews.

Nevertheless, by the end of the day, Principal Stroughter sent an email to the BHHS community apologizing that I had "deviated from the prompts" and gone "outside of the parameters of the assembly." This is incorrect. While we were given suggested prompts, we were not told that we had to use them, and I was not the only speaker not to use them. Yet, I was the only one attacked because talk about Palestinians' lived experiences and Palestinian rights makes some people uncomfortable.

Immediately upon seeing a copy of the email, on Wednesday, March 5, 2023, I sent an email to Principal Stroughter and Assistant Principal Lupone expressing my dismay that they would suggest my comments in any way "target[ed]" individuals or groups based on religion" and asked for this to be rectified immediately. My email, thus far, has been ignored. The following day, Superintendent Watson sent another communication to the BHHS community accusing me of "antisemitic rhetoric." This is outrageous and unacceptable. Both Stroughter and Watson knew that my comments focused on Palestinians' lived experiences and my personal experience fighting the racist, discriminatory structures that keep the Palestinian people occupied and oppressed.

It is unsurprising that the same special interest groups that have worked so tirelessly for decades to silence Palestinian voices were at the forefront of the attacks on me and on the BHHS student organizers and administration for hosting me. What is disappointing, is that the Bloomfield Hills school administration has gone along with these vicious, defamatory attacks, intended to detract from my message. These attacks and bogus attempts to conflate talk of Palestinian rights with antisemitism serve to keep Palestinians unseen, and unheard, and in turn, embolden Israel to continue its abuse and subjugation of an entire people yearning to be free.

At one time, and sadly still in many places across the United States today, talk of the African American experience was/is considered controversial because it might make white students "uncomfortable" and talk about LGBTQIA rights is considered inappropriate because it offends some people. I applaud BHHS and the student organizers of the diversity assembly for tackling these issues. The student organizers wanted to also bring in the issue of Palestinian rights, but the BHHS administration is showing that it does not consider Palestinians as deserving of the same rights and considerations as other groups of people. Our human rights are "too political" or "too complicated" or "might make some feel uncomfortable."

The atrocities committed by the state of Israel are well documented by the [United States](#), the [United Nations](#), the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty](#)

[International, B'tselem](#) (Israeli org), [Gisha](#) (Israeli org), the [Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) (Israeli org), [Physicians for Human Rights](#) Israel, (Israeli org) and more What is happening to Palestinians is a crime against humanity, and we Jews, Palestinians, and all people of conscience will not be silenced

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[1\]](#) Read more o Rache Corr'e's ema s here [h ps\\_rache.corr.e.ounda.on.org/rache\\_ema\\_s](https://rache.corr.e.ounda.on.org/rache_ema_s)

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President Michelle Southward  
Bloomfield Hills Schools  
Board of Education  
Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

--  
Patrick Watson  
Superintendent  
Bloomfield Hills Schools  
[pwatson@bloomfield.org](mailto:pwatson@bloomfield.org)  
[@bhswatson](#)

**Email Header:**

M M Version: 1.0  
Date: Fri, 31 Mar 2023 03:37:21 -0700  
Message-Id: <CAA8\_s2qex8ey\_Y0ZG\_wrb8o8u\_VJ\_47h\_Q7GrntWmc\_4\_Qaw@mail.gmail.com>  
Content-Type: multipart/alternative;  
boundary="050903020208070102080107"  
X-Priority: Normal  
From: Paul Kolin <pkolin@bloomfield.org>  
References: <CA\_jtVyc08i\_yo\_4AihNNpCicgG3uoa3\_abb\_ZAVq\_eyVGv\_Qg@mail.gmail.com> <CAA8\_s098cg\_YqfwrSh0ZW48TXu30N2W7\_95\_1J\_T\_jhjG\_fw@mail.gmail.com> <CA\_n\_ReplyTo: <CAA8\_s2\_tMg7e0\_ax9y\_eyi4\_1Mo\_d\_x51\_Vi\_9i5\_6k\_VYcw@mail.gmail.com>  
TO: "Jonathan VanGemert" <jvangemert@bloomfield.org>,  
"Meagan Hill" <mhill@bloomfield.org>  
From: "Paul Kolin" <pkolin@bloomfield.org>  
Content-Source-Address: pkolin@bloomfield.org  
Subject: Re: My statement on the "controversy" surrounding my comments at the University Assembly