

From: Al-Hanooti, Shayma [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, November 06, 2023 12:33 PM EST
To: Kadera, Mary <[REDACTED]>
CC: APS School Board <schoolboard@schoolboard-apsva.zendesk.com>; Duran, Francisco <[REDACTED]>; Mayo, John <[REDACTED]>; Mann, Gerald <[REDACTED]>; Graves, Kimberley <kimberley.graves@apsva.us>; Linkous, Stephen <[REDACTED]>; Crawford, Julie <[REDACTED]>; Ashby, Catherine <[REDACTED]>; Smith, Christine <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: thank you

Hello Ms. Kadera,

I'm sharing my response with your colleagues as well as Dr. Duran and his cabinet members.

Thank you for your email and for having the courage and compassion to call for an audit. I watch the school board meetings on a pretty regular basis; you consistently pose excellent questions, always with students and staff in mind.

While I appreciate you reaching out regarding my statements about the health care debacle, I'm wondering if you and/or members of the board have had an opportunity to consider my opening statements that evening, that called into question Dr. Duran's lack of balance when discussing what we are witnessing in Israel and Palestine.

Tomorrow will be one month since the most recent eruption of violence in Israel and Palestine, and we have yet to receive any language about the active genocide of Palestinians (the death toll has surpassed 10,000). Almost every single human rights organization around the world, including B'Tsalem (Israeli human rights organization) along with Amnesty International have documented ongoing human rights violations, crimes against humanity, have called Israel an apartheid regime, yet our superintendent and the offices below him are eerily silent. It is without a doubt that Israel is committing genocide, and we as American taxpayers are funding it and implicitly supporting it with our silence as a school district. We are educators! What are we teaching our kids with our silence?

When we watched—in *horror*—as Russia attacked Ukraine, as children were KILLED, our superintendent spoke out publicly. We were instructed, as teachers, to provide space and support for our students affected by the atrocities. Russia is to Israel what Ukraine is to Palestine. Palestinians have lived under a brutal occupation; what we are seeing take place in Gaza—children's limbs being marked with their names in case they get blown to pieces, babies with scarred tissue from the illegal use of white phosphorous bombs—is beyond heart-wrenching. The analogy works because Israel, like Russia, is the oppressor, aggressor, and the occupier, attempting to illegally annex more land, at any cost.

We see active ethnic cleansing in the West Bank (over 200 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7th, thousands of Palestinians forced out of their villages and homes, thousands more taken hostage in Israeli prisons—this all in the West Bank, where Hamas does not rule). It wasn't about Hamas 75 years ago. It isn't about Hamas now. We know that what we are witnessing is settler colonialism and that what we are seeing is the most advanced and violent stage of the settler colonialist project in 75 years yet. Settler colonialism only works if people are killed or forced out of their homes. We know this because this is how our country was founded. That's why we have seen the Jabalia refugee camp bombed FOUR TIMES in one week. We've seen hospitals, schools, residential buildings completely obliterated. And not a WORD from district officials about Gaza, Gazans, Palestine, Palestinians. Only a meek reference to the "Hamas-Israel war" (which is an offensive misnomer that has been used by the APS social studies office to label resources they shared) or the "conflict" in the Middle East. Since when do we name genocides "conflicts"? This isn't a war. Palestine does not have a military. It has resistance groups. Under international law, resistance is justified when people are occupied.

How are we supposed to show up for our Muslim and Arab students (and staff), if our district leaders won't even acknowledge an active genocide? This doesn't affect Gaza only. Israel has actively bombed Lebanon, Syria and the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. Still we heard nothing from our district leaders. We've learned about several instances of hate crimes—American citizens being murdered simply because they are Palestinian. Yet, we heard nothing from our district leaders. The Council on American Islamic Relations had to reschedule a fundraising event (here in Arlington!) due to death threats; still we heard nothing. Do Muslim and Palestinian lives not matter?

I've always held APS in high esteem in terms of its unwavering commitment to showing up for ALL of its students and families from every race, ethnicity and creed. The silence from the board and superintendent—worse, the imbalance in Dr. Duran's consideration of our Jewish students and the state of Israel *only*, without mention of Muslims, Palestinians, Arabs, Gazans—is so painful.

I sincerely hope that you will consider having a courageous conversation with your colleagues, and that APS leadership will stand on the right side of history. I imagine that your legal counsel has urged you all to remain silent or avoid certain language because that is the status quo messaging across every facet in the U.S. right now, but you know the saying: what is popular isn't always right, and what is right isn't always popular.

300,000 Americans showed up to march in DC for Palestine this past weekend. You can't continue to ignore the swelling outcry of the people demanding for justice all around the world. As Americans, the blood of Palestinian children is on all our hands. As educators, we HAVE to say something. Please lead by example.

Sincerely,

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Shayma M. Al-Hanooti (she/her)
English Teacher