

Durham Human Relations Commission
Golden Belt Office Center
807 E. Main Street, Building 2
Durham, NC 27701

Dear Chairperson Standaert, Vice Chairperson Taylor-Jacobs, and Honorable Members of the Human Relations Commission:

We write on behalf of two community organizations, Voice for Israel and the Durham Chapel Hill Jewish Federation. While we recognize our diverse community views, we speak for many community members who are ashamed of and appalled by the recent actions of the Durham City Council. On April 16, 2018, the City Council unanimously endorsed a statement imposing a total ban on police exchanges with only one country in the world: the Jewish nation of Israel. There was no evidence to support the City Council's actions, only propaganda lies promoted by a group that has well-documented animus toward the Jewish state.

The City Council's actions against the Jewish community in Durham and its surrounding area have created unnecessary tensions and a deep divide in our community, indefensibly giving anti-Semites a platform and sending the message that anti-Semitism will be tolerated, and perhaps even encouraged, in our community. We need your help in addressing these problems, to restore respectful relations among the people of Durham, and promote mutual understanding and regard for all citizens.

The Many Problems with the City Council's Actions

- The City Council failed to do any research or fact-gathering about Israel's law enforcement practices before it issued its statement banning all police exchanges with the Jewish state. Instead, the City Council relied on propaganda falsehoods promoted by a group that calls itself Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP).
- Despite its name, JVP does not represent Jewish voices for peace. JVP aims to steer public support away from Israel. It is a major proponent of the anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. BDS is an active facilitator to create a discriminatory environment against American Jews

who support Israel. This dynamic was directly utilized with respect to the Durham City Council resolution

- JVP also partners with other groups that deny Israel's right to exist. As the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) [reported](#), "JVP uses its Jewish identity to shield the anti-Israel movement from allegations of anti-Semitism and to provide the movement with a veneer of legitimacy."
- There is no ongoing or even anticipated relationship between the City of Durham Police Department and the State of Israel. Yet the City Council took an entirely gratuitous position; without any facts to support it, the City Council singled out Israel for condemnation and banned law enforcement exchanges with the only flourishing democracy in the Middle East and one of our country's closest allies.
- The City Council's statement was informed by a prior petition sponsored by JVP. Without any factual foundation, the petition promoted the lie that police exchange programs with Israel contribute to police brutality here in the United States.
- JVP's actions are not only anti-Israel; they also promote and enable anti-Semitism. As part of its [campaign](#) falsely accusing Israel of police brutality toward minorities, JVP falsely accused several Jewish organizations – including the ADL and the American Jewish Committee – of facilitating the brutality. As writer Jonathan S. Tobin [noted](#), "In doing so, [JVP] engaged in what can only be described as an anti-Semitic blood libel, seeking to blame Jews for police shootings of African-Americans."
- The City Council was wrongly selective about what it included in the statement it issued, leaving out important information that did not support an agenda hostile to Israel. The City Council's statement quoted from a memorandum from the Durham Police Chief in which she stated that "there has been no effort while I have served as Chief of Police to initiate or participate in any exchange to Israel, nor do I have any intention to do so."

Not included was the Police Chief's statements in the very same memorandum which reflected her own positive training experience in Israel.

- The City Council's actions violate the spirit of North Carolina's anti-BDS law (N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 147-86.80 – 147.86.83), which prohibits the state from doing business with companies that boycott Israel. Governor Roy Cooper was among the 50 governors across the United States to publicly condemn the BDS movement, affirming that “[t]he goals of the BDS movement are antithetical to our values and the values of our respective states.”
- The City Council's actions are hateful, discriminatory and against the values of our country and our city, targeting the one Jewish state in the world. According to civil rights attorneys to whom Voice for Israel has spoken, the actions may implicate (a) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e, which prohibits discrimination based on religion and national origin, among other protected categories; and (b) North Carolina's civil rights laws which make it clear that it is our state's public policy “to protect and safeguard the right of all persons to seek, obtain and hold employment without discrimination” based on race, religion, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. N.C. Gen. Stat. §143-422.2.
- The City Council's statement has created a painful and unnecessary divide in our community, causing many Jews and Israel supporters to feel targeted and unwelcome in the City of Durham.
- The City Council shamefully gave a podium to Israel-bashers and anti-Semites. At the City Council meeting on April 16th, one speaker actually [referred](#) to Jews as the “synagogue of Satan . . . always lingering in the background . . . “They [the Jews] propose to be of the righteous but they are the synagogue of Satan.” Plainly feeling free to express his Jew-hatred even more blatantly, the speaker went on to say, “I am obligated to point out the inordinate control that some Jews have over the political system in this city.” While the City Council is not responsible for the anti-Semitism that this

speaker spewed, the City Council's willingness to target and ban a police exchange with the one Jewish state in the world sent the message to this and other anti-Semites that their anti-Semitism is acceptable and would be tolerated.

- Indeed, some people heard that message loud and clear, and acted on it. Within only two weeks of the City Council's statement, the City of Durham already experienced several incidents of racism and anti-Semitism. On May 1, the *Herald Sun* [reported](#) that white nationalist stickers and anti-Semitic posters were discovered in downtown Durham. One poster depicted a silhouetted man pointing a gun at a bearded man with a long nose, wearing a yarmulke, with tentacles wrapping around the earth, with the message: "Right of revolution. Your ancestors threw off foreign oppression, time for you as well." Another poster said, "Greedy Jews" and "End Zionist Oppression." Both posters are plain evidence that anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism are intertwined. They demonstrate that criticism of Israel and Zionism – the expression of the Jewish people's right to live in their religious and ancestral homeland – can be manifestations of Jew-hatred. These posters are not only hateful; they are also threatening, breeding fear among Jews in Durham. One resident told the *Sun*: "I was deeply disturbed and, to be honest, frightened. . . [T]hese vile anti-Semitic threats, including the image of a gun pointing to a Jew, really rattled me . . . Seeing incitements to shoot Jews in my hometown is not something I ever imagined." This situation, which the City Council's actions facilitated, should be as intolerable to you as it is to us.
- The City Council's business should be focused on the needs of the City of Durham, not on the conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else. JVP's hateful agenda is not ours.

Suggested Solutions for the Commission to Implement

We respectfully urge the Human Relations Commission to exercise its authority to address these problems, restore respectful relations among the people of Durham, and promote mutual understanding and regard for all citizens, by taking the following steps:

- Provide a public forum so that all the foregoing complaints about the City Council's statement can be heard, fully and fairly;
- Obtain the necessary factual data to determine whether the City Council's statement is supported by the facts and whether it genuinely meets the needs of the City of Durham;
- If the foregoing actions show – as we believe it will – that the City Council's statement was unfair, unwarranted and discriminatory, and created unnecessary tensions and divides within the Durham community, then issue a recommendation that the City Council's statement should be rescinded; and
- Strongly caution the City Council that, in the future, it must make determinations based on independent, unbiased research and evidence rooted in facts, not hateful propaganda.

We respectfully request that you consider our concerns and suggested solutions at your next meeting and we look forward to hearing from you.

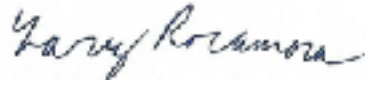
Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Ross".

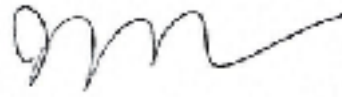
Michael Ross, Chair of the Voice for Israel

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Gutman".

Robert Gutman, Vice Chair of the Voice for Israel

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Rocamora".

Larry Rocamora, President of the Durham Chapel Hill Jewish Federation

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jill Madsen".

Jill Madsen, Chief Executive Officer of the Durham Chapel Hill Jewish Federation