

COMMENTS FROM A YOUNG PERSON

Hi, I'm Jenny Blass, I'm 15, and I'm a high school freshman. I'm also Jewish, and really proud of my culture and heritage, which includes pride in Israel. Normally, I consider myself lucky to live in an extremely tolerant part of the world, where fairness and equal treatment is considered a right. However, recent actions by the Durham City Council have caused me to rethink my beliefs. The way that they specifically singled out Israel and portrayed it as violent and militant was insulting, and extremely unfair. But I'm sure that many people here today are going to go into detail about why this was wrong, so instead I'm going to talk about how this affects people, particularly myself.

At first, when I heard about what the city council had done, I felt shocked, and couldn't believe it. After all, isn't Durham supposed to be a "progressive" town, which promotes tolerance and inclusivity? As the knowledge started to sink in, I, like I think a lot of you, felt anger, which is understandable and justifiable. However, I also felt something else. I felt afraid. It wasn't fear for Israel, even though I have family there and am acquainted with many people from there. Israel as a country will survive no matter how the city of Durham feels about it. It was fear for myself, and the people here I know, because of the sentiment expressed by the city council's words. It may seem trivial, but it's something that anti-semites can, have, and will now continue to use to justify their hate. For those of you who weren't there, when I say have, I'm referencing what happened during the city council meeting, with somebody at one point even calling Judaism the "synagogue of Satan". By making these types of statements, you embolden these types of people, and though I have yet to experience blatant anti-semitism at my school, a new part of me now wonders if it's only a matter of time. And I'm not alone. A quote that I received when preparing this speech by Rabbi Zalman Bluming reads "My phone has been ringing non-stop over the last week, [from] young adults that live here that feel unsafe, that feel marginalized, that feel as if for some reason they've been singled out". I wish I wasn't able to sympathize with that. When you say these sorts of things you don't just affect people's pride,

you affect their trust and sense of security in the city that they live in. I understand that this wasn't done in the spirit of anti-semitism, but please, as they taught us in kindergarten, think before you speak.