

John T. Fussell
175 Garfield Road
West Hartford, CT 06107

September 11, 2017

Senator Richard Blumenthal
706 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

I am a labor lawyer representing many labor Unions in Connecticut and am also Vice President of Tree of Life Educational Fund. Saturday I returned from a nine-day labor delegation trip to Palestine and Israel. This was my fifth trip since 2010, and my second labor delegation trip since 2015. Several Connecticut trade unionists accompanied me on the 2015 and 2017 journeys.

Based upon my several trips to Israel and Palestine and extensive reading, your correspondence on this subject appears tragically oblivious to the reoccurring human rights violations suffered by the Palestinian people that result from Israel's policies, including the ongoing establishment of illegal Israeli outpost and settlement construction throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

You appear to turn a blind eye to the ongoing discrimination, displacement, dispossession and death suffered by the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli government. The ongoing settler violence, Israeli military night raids on Palestinian homes, arrest and detentions without due process to which the Palestinian men, women and children are subjected are not acknowledged in your letters. Likewise you ignore that since 1967, 3 million West Bank Palestinians are subject to military tribunals for which they have no voice or vote while the Israeli citizen settlers within the West Bank are treated to civilian law. Is this not a form of Apartheid? Such undemocratic policies deserve condemnation rather than the unconditional support for Israel expressed in your correspondence.

You fail to acknowledge the combined 1,000,000 Palestinians forcibly displaced from their homes and villages in 1948 and 1967, still not allowed the right of return. Now grown to five million, much of this displaced population languishes in "refugee camps" in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. If your family were subjected to the dismal conditions of these camps, as we witnessed in the Dheisheh camp, you would not be so kind in your praise of Israel. You also fail to acknowledge the plight of many African refugees herded by Israel into detention centers and turned-back to poverty and war torn nations.

Your correspondence demonstrates no understanding of how the siege of Gaza and the matrix of control (military check points, the illegal annexation wall, and by-pass roads) throughout the West Bank have crippled and disabled the Palestinian economy and reduced the Palestinians worker to a source of cheap labor exploited in the illegal settlements and in Israel. Our labor delegation, with the assistance of Palestinian trade unionist, witnessed the humiliation and hardship of the daily early morning checkpoint crossings into Israel endured by tens of thousands of Palestinian construction and service workers unable to find employment in their own towns and cities. We learned of the miserable, underpaid, unsafe conditions under which they toil in order to provide for their families whom they barely see as a result of the long workday caused by the Israeli checkpoints. We met a Palestinian worker who suffered three broken ribs in the morning metal bar checkpoint crush that resembles a cattle-loading dock.

We toured Hebron and saw how Israeli settlers and military have reduced the once thriving commercial center into a ghost town. We walked Shuhada Street and witnessed the shops and homes welded shut by the Israeli military. We visited the Ibrahim Mosque where Dr. Baruch Goldstein, a Brooklyn New York native, massacred 29 worshipping Palestinians. We passed Kiryat Arba where a memorial park is constructed in his honor.

We toured East Jerusalem and witnessed the intentional underdevelopment suffered by the 300,000 Palestinians residents who pay taxes to Israel but are not citizens and receive less services than do the Israelis. We saw East Jerusalem Palestinian homes from which the residents were forcibly removed and permanently occupied by Israeli radical colonialist. We learned of the racial policies of Jerusalem social economic development plan that treats Palestinians as a “demographic threat.” The Plan openly and unabashedly limits the balance of population of Jerusalem to no more than thirty percent Palestinian. Imagine the outcry if U.S. planners expressed urban development in such racist terms.

Likewise we met with Arab List Knesset member Aida Touma-Sliman and learned of the multiple discriminatory laws to which the Israeli Palestinian citizens are subjected including the intentional underdevelopment of the Palestinian towns within 1948 Israel.

These tragic intentional discriminatory and occupation policies contribute to the cycle of violence inappropriately referenced as the “Israel/Palestine conflict” as though it were conflict of equals. It is not, in large part due to Congress’s unconditional support for the State of Israel. Israelis with whom we met, including trade unionists, former Israeli soldiers, Jeff Halper of Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions, as well as Israeli journalist Gideon Levy likewise confirmed this and all that we witnessed.

So when you assert that Israel is a bastion of democracy I must question your judgment as well as your knowledge of the facts on the ground. Perhaps you have been treated to AIPAC type tours of Israel and/or meet frequently with representatives of the Israeli lobby. In this regard, I request of you, as my Senator, to at least allow our labor delegation to meet and share in more detail what we have learned about the imbalance of power and Israel’s abhorrent treatment of the Palestinian people. Even better, I encourage you to join one of our delegations to Israel/Palestine so that you will have a more balanced understanding of the facts on the ground.

The values of democracy, freedom and equal rights are inconsistent with Israel’s policies towards the Palestinian people. The people of Israel and Palestine deserve a sustainable peace based on a just resolution of this ongoing tragedy. The people of United States should not have to support such reprehensible policies by grants of “\$38 billion in military assistance to Israel for Fiscal Years 2019-2028, the largest commitment in U.S. history.” Our tax dollars are better utilized addressing our Nation’s inner cities poverty, our nation’s infrastructure needs, as well as health care, retirement, and higher education tuition relief. Congress’s uncritical support for Israel only serves to prolong this tragedy. I beg of you, let facts and our nation’s better values guide your future actions concerning Israel and Palestine. Please let me know when we can arrange a meeting with you.

Sincerely,

John T. Fussell