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Palestinians, supporters demand Charleston City Council call for cease-fire

Charleston, West Virginia

Over 200 Palestinian and pro-Palestine activists packed a City Council meeting in Charleston, West Virginia's capital, on Jan. 3. The crowd attended the meeting in anticipation of a vote regarding a cease-fire resolution previously proposed by progressive City Councilmember Joe Solomon, with the support of Palestinian constituents. Solomon, the only Jewish member of the 26-member City Council, is an outspoken opponent of the ongoing genocide in occupied Palestine.



Protesters outside Charleston, West Virginia, City Council chambers to demand passage of a resolution calling for a cease-fire in Palestine, Jan. 3, 2024. (WW Photo: Otis Grotewohl)

The purpose of the resolution was to pressure the U.S. Congress to stop funding the continuous murder of Palestinian people. In response to the courageous resolution, Charleston's Democratic Mayor Amy Goodwin countered it with a "neutral" letter addressed to the state's congressional delegation, which 20 Councilmembers signed.

Mayor Goodwin's letter is a moderate, milquetoast way of avoiding taking a side in the genocidal conflict. The letter infuriated Charleston residents in the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic communities, as well as supporters of Palestinian liberation – and even some City Councilmembers, including Solomon.

Many critics of Mayor's Goodwin's letter have compared it to the white-chauvinist "all lives matter" rhetoric that racist reactionaries spewed in response to the spirited Black Lives Matter movement. The letter ignores the Palestinian plight of national oppression, colonial-military occupation and ethnic cleansing.

People show up en masse for cease-fire resolution

A large crowd gathered in a wide hallway before being ushered into City Hall chambers and another room next door. Most of the attendees were Arab and Muslim and there were people of all generations. The majority of people in the crowd were wearing keffiyehs – scarves worn by Palestinians and their allies and symbols of resistance. Many young people were symbolically holding dolls wrapped in bandages with red coloring to represent the blood of the staggering number of babies butchered by Israeli forces.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Councilmember Solomon proudly told the crowd that they were the largest grouping he had seen at a Charleston City Council meeting. Some people in attendance spoke up in favor of the resolution during public comment, including Jewish community members who support the cease-fire resolution.

This writer heard Solomon state, in opposition to the mayor's letter: "The letter doesn't call for a cease-fire. It calls for warmth and 'love,' but without a plan. We need to send a simple request to ask for a permanent, humanitarian cease-fire."

Solomon passionately emphasized: "Every day, bombs are dropped in Palestine with the stated goal of ending Hamas and rescuing hostages. And every day, these bombs are killing innocent civilians too — especially women and children. Over 22,000 lives lost have been counted by the Gaza Health Ministry — including over 8,000 children."

Following Solomon's heartfelt speech, several city officials moved to table the resolution in favor of the mayor's letter. Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, most Councilmembers voted for tabling, which is a stalling tactic. People in the crowd erupted in anger, shouting, "Shame, shame!" From there, other chants followed.

Attendees gathered back in the hallway, militantly chanting; “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!” and “Not another nickel, not another dime, no more money for Israel’s crimes!” followed by, “Not another penny, not another dollar, we won’t pay for Israel’s slaughter!” The police forced people to disperse, threatening arrests, which sparked a spontaneous chant, “Mayor Goodwin, you can’t hide, you’ve been charged with genocide.”

The U.S.-led Israeli genocide is destroying the lives of Palestinian families all around the world, including in cities and small towns in the U.S. It is crucial that the solidarity movement takes every possible opportunity to expose and fight the U.S. and Israeli war machines.



Stuffed animals and candles memorialize Palestinian children killed in Israel’s genocide, Charleston, West Virginia, Jan. 3, 2024. (WW Photo: Otis Grotewohl)

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