



The Humanities and Religious Studies Department's

Statement on the Crisis in Israel and Palestine

The Humanities and Religious Studies Department is deeply saddened by the horrors unfolding in Israel and Palestine, and the resulting loss of life. We bear witness to the suffering of those who are caught up in the escalating conflict. As the 13th-century Muslim poet Saadi of Shiraz says in his poem *Bani Adam* [The Children of Adam], “Human beings are like parts of a body, diversely created from a divine essence. When one part is hurt and in pain, the others cannot remain in peace and be quiet. If the misery of others leaves you indifferent, with no feelings of sorrow, you cannot be rightfully called a complete human being.”

We grieve with Israeli and Palestinian families as they bear the unbearable, and we recognize the impacts of their suffering on the members of campus communities across the United States and the world. Within Jewish traditions, a lament is expressed in Jeremiah, “Thus said the Lord of Hosts: / Listen! Summon the dirge-singers, let them come; / Send for the skilled women, let them come. / Let them quickly start a wailing for us, / That our eyes may run with tears, / Our pupils flow with water... / How greatly we are shamed! / Ah, we must leave our land, / Abandon our dwellings! / Hear, O women, the word of the Lord, / Let your ears receive the word of His mouth, / And teach your daughters wailing, / And one another lamentation. / For death has climbed through our windows, / Has entered our fortresses, / To cut off babes from the streets, / Young men from the squares” (9:16-20).

We reject hatred in all its forms—Antisemitism and Islamophobia—during this tragic time. We recognize that when Israeli Jews are killed in their homes, and it is celebrated by people who claim to be anti-racists and anti-fascists, that is experienced as antisemitism by a great many Jews. We also recognize that widespread Islamophobia can enable the minimization or erasure of the deaths of Palestinian civilians within public discourse. Our department is fiercely opposed to all forms of identity-based hatred and bullying. We remain steadfastly committed to the promotion of religious literacy and to fostering an inclusive campus climate for students of all faiths and none.

Finally, we would like to share the words of Valarie Kaur, a Sikh Interfaith leader, author, lawyer, and civil rights activist who spoke about the unfolding horrors in ways that are consistent with the Department’s values:

“Our most powerful response to the horror in Israel and Palestine is to refuse to surrender the fullness of our humanity.

You will be told by some: the deaths of Israeli children are unfortunate but inevitable because Israel’s occupation of Palestine is brutal and wrong.

You will be told by others: the deaths of Palestinian children are unfortunate but inevitable because it is the only way to keep Israel safe from terror, and Hamas brought this on its own people.

You will hear: our aggression is the only response to their aggression, our fear more justified than their fear, our grief more devastating than theirs can ever be.

Yet the hierarchy of pain is [an endless cycle]. The moment we allow our hearts to go numb is the moment we shut down our humanity.

I don't know the solution to the conflict in Israel and Palestine, but I do know the starting point: To grieve "their" children as our children. It's the only way to break the cycle.

...To those of us witnessing Israel and Palestine: Opening our hearts to grief—others' and our own—is how we hold our humanity in a world that would destroy it."

Shalom & Salaam,

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