



Seeking Peace in Gaza Norman Olshansky, President

Let me say up front. I am Jewish, I'm a Zionist and I am extremely concerned about the fate of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Judaism is a religion of people who are part of an interconnected and diverse community. We have values and ethics in our scriptures which have been adopted and become part of Christian and many other religious traditions. We value life, we feed the hungry, provide shelter to the homeless and redeem the captives. Some of our traditions are unique to Judaism but others are universal. We are not a racial group. Jews include people of all races from regions throughout the world.

We detest the violence of war and the devastating casualties and destruction we see in rocket ravaged cities, in Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria and elsewhere.

Zionism is the belief and support of the homeland for the Jewish people in the State of Israel. Israel operates as a Jewish democratic state but unlike other religious states in the Middle East, Christians, Muslims, Bahai, Druze, and other religions and racial groups are included among Israel's citizens, who vote and who serve in all aspects of civil society. Unlike in many other Islamic countries, there is freedom of religion for all in Israel. The accusation that Israel is an apartheid state defies the reality.

The West Bank and Gaza are not within the State of Israel. The West Bank (of Jordan) refers to that part of the territories that were part of the Kingdom of

Jordan before the 6 day war in 1967 when Israel was involved in a war against a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt. Israel won that war and took over administration of those areas. Israel now shares administration of the West Bank with the Palestinian Authority (formerly the Palestinian Liberation Organization). Parts of the West Bank continue to be disputed territories, according to the United Nations. Jordan does not want to take back the West Bank. Palestinians are already a significant part of the Jordanian population and are seen as a threat to the Hashemite Kingdom under King Abdullah Hussein.

Gaza is a small territory formerly part of Egypt and just north of its border along the Mediterranean Sea. For many years Gaza was under the Palestinian Authority but Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement), won elections in 2006, took power in 2007 and initiated rocket attacks on Israel that continue to this day. Hamas was also responsible for the October, 2023 invasion, and killing of over 1200 Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and others who were living near or attending the music festival in Southern Israel. In addition, they took over 250 hostages, 50 are still in captivity. Hamas has enshrined in its charter a call for the complete destruction and elimination of Israel and has never recognized its right to exist.

Let's operate on facts and history and not on social media slogans. Calling to "globalize the intifada" or engage in chants "from the river to the sea Gaza will be free" does not help Gazans in need. It shows support for Hamas and their desire to completely eliminate the State of Israel. There is a war going on and lots of innocent people are dying and made homeless in Gaza and Israel. Let's support those affected by the war. Show support by calling on Egypt, the U.N. and Israel to get more of the food sent to Gaza, to the people who need it. However, also pressure Hamas to cooperate with those who are trying to safely distribute food. Please advocate for Hamas to release the hostages and for Israel to have a ceasefire. Spreading false information will not help. Let's advocate and pray for peace.

Norman Olshansky is a long time Sarasota resident and President of the Suncoast Jewish Alliance

