



**Israelis and Palestinians.
Two Peoples, One Future.
www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org**

**Sacramento Region Chapter
sacramento@jewishvoiceforpeace.org**

August 28, 2018

To: Members of the California Legislative Latino Caucus

Re: **PLEASE DECLINE A PARTISAN INVITATION TO TOUR ISRAEL**

We write you as members and representatives of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) in California. Inspired by the Jewish tradition of social justice, JVP works to achieve equality and dignity for Palestinians and Jews in Israel-Palestine, and to demand U.S. policies that are consistent with international law and human rights for all. JVP is one of the fastest-growing Jewish organizations in the country, with over 13,500 members and 250,000 online supporters, about 3,000 and 32,000 of these, respectively, in California alone. We have some 75 chapters across the country; eight, plus several campus chapters, are in California.

We understand that members of the California Latino Congressional Caucus have been invited to an all-expense-paid tour of Israel organized by the Israeli government together with the America-Israel Friendship League (<https://aifl.org/>), a pro-Israel advocacy organization that states its “sole purpose is to make friends for the State of Israel through activities intended to improve the general perception of Israel.” We urge you to decline this and any such invitation in the future, because the tour is designed to conceal the reality of Israel's grave violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people and to portray Israel – one of the mightiest militaries in the world – as the victim in its own occupation and unlawful colonization of the Palestinian territories.

The extent to which the AIFL tour is calculated to propagandize rather than to inform can be gleaned in reports about a similar tour arranged for California Assembly members in July by the American Jewish Committee (AJC). See <https://www.ajc.org/news/trip-to-jittery-israel-an-eye-opener-for-california-assemblymembers>. In the same time frame that tour participants were being led around upscale cities like Tel Aviv, exclaiming over what “a happy, peaceful place” Israel is, some 20 miles away in Gaza, Israeli soldier-snipers were killing and grievously wounding unarmed civilians – thousands in the past five months, including children, journalists and medics. (See <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-snapshot-casualties-context-demonstrations-and-hostilities-gaza-30-march-2>.) The victims were – and still are – protesting Israel's 11-year blockade of the area and calling for their right to return to the villages from which they and their families had been expelled when Israel was established. And in the West Bank, some 30 miles away, hidden behind Israel's illegal “separation wall,” the Israeli government was proceeding with plans to forcibly transfer thousands of Palestinians living in farming and shepherding communities to make way for further expansion of Jewish-only settlements on Palestinian land: https://www.btselem.org/press_release/20180611_khan_al_ahmar_petition.

Although international law prohibits an occupying country from transferring any of its civilian population to the occupied land, there are now more than 700,000 Jewish settlers living in the occupied West Bank, including illegally annexed East Jerusalem:

<https://www.btselem.org/topic/settlements>. The settlers have full citizenship rights, while occupied Palestinians are under authoritarian military rule.

Many of the Israeli government's policies, which officially privilege Jewish people above all others, are inimical to the values of the Latino Legislative Caucus and to your constituents, including, to mention only a few: its refusal to consider asylum claims by almost all of the tens of thousands of African refugees in Israel, deeming them "infiltrators" subject to indefinite detention or forced deportation; its use of mandatory identification cards that distinguish between Israeli citizens based on their religion, facilitating the application of myriad discriminatory laws and practices; and, in its recently passed Nation-State Law, establishing Hebrew as the only official language and downgrading the status of Arabic, primary language of some 20 percent of its citizens. The law also declares Israel to be the homeland of only the Jewish people; imagine a U.S. law declaring our country the homeland of whites only, not Native Americans, black or brown people.

If you do go to Israel with AIFL, we urge you to take steps to correct the false narrative it advances by extending your stay to join a tour led by Israeli human rights organizations such as the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions (<https://icahd.org/extended-study-tours/>) or Breaking the Silence (<https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il>). We are in direct touch with them and others, and we could help arrange for a customized tour for a group of legislators.

If you are among those invited in the AIFL trip, please let us know your decision on whether to attend. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and share a human-rights perspective on the issues.

With two JVP national offices – in Berkeley and in New York City – a government affairs liaison in Washington, D.C. and chapters in Sacramento and around California, JVP has extensive information and resources we can share with you concerning U.S. policy in Israel-Palestine.

Sincerely,

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For California's Jewish Voice for Peace chapters