

Mayor Mike Savage
Remarks to Council regarding Israel and Gaza
Delivered: Nov. 28, 2023

We are entering the Christmas season, when lights shine on houses and trees are lit throughout the community as we gather with family and friends.

Whatever our faith, and whether we hold religious belief or not, we recognize the significance of light, warming us in its glow as it pushes away darkness, a darkness that is particularly pervasive at present.

In Islam, the Quran states God “is the light of the heaven and earth” and the Prophet Mohammed is an “illuminating lamp.” During Eid celebrations Muslims light lamps and decorate homes.

For Hindus and Sikhs, Diwali is the “Festival of Lights” symbolizing spiritual “victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance.”

During Hanukkah, Jews celebrate by lighting the menorah and placing it in the window as a symbol of light and hope for a new beginning. Light over darkness.

In my Christian faith, according to the book of Genesis, God said “Let there be light, and created the sun, the moon and the stars.”

And, yet today, we may struggle to find the light in the darkness. War, violence, and hate are all around us. Israel and Hamas, Ukraine and Russia, Sudan, Central African Republic, Libya, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and many others.

Though far from Halifax, residents of this community are affected by their impact, they worry about friends and families in conflict zones.

As leaders in our communities, we are often asked to take positions on world events. Even if that view will have no bearing on those events, residents want to know where we stand. It should come as no surprise that we have been asked by

Jewish and Muslim members of our community to offer our opinion on the war dominating the news and countless lives.

The October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, indiscriminately killing and injuring civilians, and taking hundreds hostage, including the very old and the very young, was a horror. It was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. As any country would do, Israel responded. For many weeks Gaza was bombarded, and thousands of residents of Gaza, have died while thousands more remain desperate for food, water, medical supplies and a route to safety.

Friday, November 24, marked the first reprieve – a truce while hostages and prisoners could be exchanged, and much needed humanitarian aid could be delivered to Gaza. I hope and advocate for an extension of this ceasefire. I also hope the security of all people, Israeli and Palestinian, is protected.

The reverberations of this war are felt in cities and communities across Canada that are home to diverse populations, including many Jewish and Muslim Canadian residents with ties to Israel and Gaza.

The war may be far away, but the pain is close to home.

Cities and communities across the country have seen a rise in Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We must reject these points of view, and we must do so actively. They are members of our community, a community that must stand as one and resist the pull to the extremes.

In this city where an Imam and a Rabbi can still wish the best for each other, where Jewish and Muslim children share classrooms and playgrounds, we must continue to honour our common humanity. As Mayor, I have the same care and concern for all residents; I acknowledge their pain, their fear, and their desire to live in peace.

I hope that even at this most difficult time, as we approach the shortest and darkest day of the year, we can come together to let in light, to work for peace, and to see the best in each other in our Halifax community.

Thank you.