



December 15, 2023

Mayor Valerie Amezcu  
20 Civic Center Plaza  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

**Subject: Addressing Bias Against Pro-Palestinian Attendees of the Dec. 5th Santa Ana City Council Meeting**

Dear Mayor Amezcu,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to you today with a heavy heart and a profound sense of disappointment regarding the city council's recent decision not to support a ceasefire in Gaza. The ongoing violence in Gaza has been described by the United Nations and human rights organizations from around the world as genocide and ethnic cleansing. We are at a critical point, with countless innocent lives hanging in the balance.

Delaying a ceasefire not only exacerbates the suffering of the civilian population, it also perpetuates a cycle of violence and harm that impacts us all. It is disheartening to witness the city of Santa Ana, known as a progressive leader in Orange County, dismiss the people's call for justice and peace and fall short in advocating for a diplomatic and humane resolution to this crisis.

We also want to express our deep concern and frustration, Mayor, regarding your recent actions at the city council meeting on December 5, 2023, which demonstrated a blatant and harmful bias against Palestinians and their allies within the Santa Ana community, many of whom have lost multiple family members in Gaza since October 7<sup>th</sup>.

For example, city staff told multiple meeting attendees that they could not submit comment cards on behalf of people who were not yet present. However, a meeting attendee who came to speak against the ceasefire resolution was recorded on video stating that a public comment card had been submitted on her behalf "by the Mayor" prior to her arrival at the council meeting.

Further, during the city council meeting, you elected to limit the amount of time allowed for public comments to only two hours, preventing at least half of the more than 140 in-person attendees who had signed up to give public comment from speaking, and denying many more community members from speaking via Zoom. The comments that were allowed to be heard were overwhelmingly in support of the ceasefire resolution. This restriction prevented many constituents from being heard and from being put on the record as supporters of the ceasefire resolution, hindering the overall documentation of the community's support for the resolution.

Additionally, an anti-ceasefire speaker stated that she would be speaking on behalf of another person whose name was called because the person had left the meeting early. Instead of being asked to sit down and wait for her actual place in line, she was allowed to speak ahead of other, majority pro-ceasefire, speakers.

Lastly, you repeatedly chastised pro-ceasefire members of the public for being periodically disruptive and even threatened the removal of several individuals, but you ignored similar disruptions from anti-ceasefire members of the public. We were appalled at the amount of police officers present at the meeting, which set a hostile and defensive tone at the outset, and by how often you invoked police while threatening to remove pro-Palestinian attendees from the meeting.

These incidents show clear bias in favor of the attendees who were against the ceasefire resolution, a position you had already publicly announced and were actively trying to promote during the meeting by undermining the presence of pro-Palestinian residents and local community organizers.

And it must be stated, Mayor, that your dismissive comments and body language throughout the comment period were insulting and prejudiced against our pro-ceasefire attendees. The public watched as you rolled your eyes and expressed absolutely no empathy while our Palestinian community members spoke of the numbers of their own family members killed in Gaza. Even more offensive, you had the audacity to call into question whether the pictures of slain children in Gaza being held up by the pro-Palestinian attendees were real. No such accusation was made towards other attendees who held up pictures of Israeli hostages.

Your behavior during this process has been extremely damaging towards your relationship with the Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian communities, and their allies. One of these incidents alone would cause concern, but the aggregate justifies outrage.

To address this matter effectively, it is critical for you to issue a public apology to the community. An apology would show your commitment to addressing any potential bias, thereby strengthening our community, and reaffirming your dedication to the ideals that are central to Santa Ana. Santa Ana has always been a proponent of human rights, diversity, justice, and kindness, and an apology to our community would be in line with these deeply held values.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We trust that you will consider the implications of your decision on the lives of countless innocent civilians and the image of our city as a beacon of justice and compassion.

Sincerely,

Council on American-Islamic Relations, Los Angeles (CAIR-LA)  
Orange County Equality Coalition  
Orange County Justice for Palestine  
Arab American Civic Council  
Yalla Indivisible  
Chispa  
People's Budget Orange County  
Jewish Voice for Peace Action, Greater Los Angeles (JVP-LA)  
Lawyers Against Genocide  
Arab-American Caucus, CDP

Al-Awda Palestinian Right of Return Coalition  
ANSWER Coalition  
OC Protests  
Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL)  
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)  
Orange County Rapid Response Network