

“Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.” These are the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which I first read not too long ago, when I learned about major African-American civil rights leaders and their quest for equality in America. As an Arab-American living in a post-9/11 world in which normalcy is constituted by discrimination and double standards, I drew many parallels between the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the struggle my people face in America and abroad. Dr. King’s words are the words I live by. These are the words that explain my dedication to one of the greatest human injustices of our time: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

It is something we see in the news every day, but it still seems that many in America do not completely understand the reason this violent cycle occurs. As an undergraduate student, I had the opportunity to found a student organization, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), dedicated to educating our campus about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Palestine. My goal was to provide an accurate resource of information to the Case community, one that we cannot find in the mainstream media, which often times portrays the Palestinian people as less than a people. *It is this hatred, no matter how passive it may be, that destroys our sense of values.* This is the same media that often portrays the Palestinians using suicide bombers as resistance, contrary to Dr. King’s ideology of non-violence. *It is this hatred that confuses the true with the false and the false with the true.* An overwhelming majority of resistance to the Israeli occupation and violation of the Palestinians’ human rights is in the form of non-violence, my group included. It is our duty as conscientious human citizens to correct and clarify this confusion that demonizes the victim and glorifies the oppressor, or that *describes the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful.*

SJP’s goal is to foster a greater understanding of the conflict that plagues not only those in the region, but the entire global community as well. A greater understanding will facilitate us in reaching our goal of justice and a permanent peace for all. We encourage our campus to actively seek truth, because I know that American citizens are unlike any other in their display of goodwill and relentless pursuit of justice for all mankind when the truth is discovered. We show the campus the realities of the conflict, present a solution for peace, and mobilize the community to spread this awareness. Similar to Dr. King, I take the same non-violent stance as the Arab Peace Initiative, which states that “a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace or provide security to the parties.” Dr. King was a champion of his people, speaking of their plight and road towards equality and justice. He made it very clear that we should act against injustice, and I am trying to follow his footsteps. My goal is to cease the death and destruction wrought on innocent human beings and to bring civil, human, and equal rights to the Palestinian people, along with the freedom that they have been deprived of for too long. Because after all, they are human beings like you and me. Some may call me naïve, but this is a dream that I will do everything in my power to realize. My only interest is peace, and to have a true peace you must have justice. To serve justice, you must know the violations perpetrated. As Ohio State law professor John Quigley said, “I remain convinced that a peace not based on justice may turn out to be no peace at all.”

This is the human injustice that has moved me greatly, so that I have already sacrificed my time and energy in order to make a difference. I have engaged my community by advocating for a just

resolution, and will continue to do so. I have sponsored events filled with entertainment, academia, and most importantly, truth. This includes hosting speakers such as Anna Baltzer (granddaughter of Holocaust survivors), a Jewish and Palestinian-American comedian duo, Arab-American hip hop performers, and the world renowned Palestinian poet Suheir Hammad. A lot of time, effort, and money were needed for these events, but the investment was well worth it as these events conveyed the meaning of humanity and instilled a purposeful sense of compassion in my audience. Our activism resulted in the promotion of peaceful dialogue which had a direct positive impact on our campus. The support for SJP, coming from students, teachers, and administrators, grew remarkably as a result of these efforts, and in doing so, the demand for justice grew.

Many people believe that our advocacy favors one Palestinian side, and discriminates against the other Israeli or Jewish side. My belief is that a truly pro-Palestinian advocacy group is truly pro-Israeli, because a true peace achieved in the Middle East will benefit everyone: it will provide security to the Israelis. It will grant the Palestinians nationhood. And it will improve America's image as a true beacon of freedom to the world. These possibilities fuel my desire to do what I do. Our mission is evidently universal, as we have members from all ethnicities, including Israeli, and members from all religions, including Jewish members. In Dr. King's *Let My People Go* speech in 1965, he said that "The struggle for freedom forms one long front crossing oceans and mountains. The brotherhood of man is not confined within a narrow, limited circle of select people. It is felt everywhere in the world, it is an international sentiment of surpassing strength and because this is true when men of good will finally unite they will be invincible." Our diversity only strengthens our fight for equality. I take a similar approach to that of Norman Finkelstein, an esteemed Jewish scholar on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the son of Holocaust survivors, and a true champion of humanity: Rather than ask "are you Palestinian? Are you Jewish? What God do you believe in?" I ask "Do you support ethnic cleansing? Do you support Jew-only roads? Do you support the killing of innocent civilians?" If the answer is "No. No. No.", I welcome them in my pursuit of justice and peace, no matter the color of their skin or the ideologies they hold. SJP is pro-justice, hence pro-peace. I am a strong believer in humanity, and I refuse to have my spark of humanity extinguished, even in the darkest times we face.

Ten days ago, Israel began what will be a long and costly military operation inside the Gaza Strip in Palestine. To date, thousands of Palestinians, many of them women and children, were killed and injured. Five Israelis, three of which were civilians, also regrettably lost their lives amidst this violent incursion which has received condemnation from the international community, minus America. An immediate cessation of hostilities was called for by the international community, minus America. Violence is not the answer, but neither is ignorance or neglect. These responses will only breed more extremism and resentment towards our government. Families will never forget what happened to their loved ones, and this unchecked cancer called hate will once again arise, literally, from the rubble of bombed-out houses and limp bodies. Let us put a genuine effort into stopping this cycle of violence. We have the cure, and it is called justice.

When I graduate in May, my untold story will begin, and I will continue the path I laid out for myself at Case. I will continue the fight for equality, justice, and peace. I will continue until this human injustice becomes a human justice. And even if my ultimate goal is not achieved, I would have some

peace of mind knowing that I really tried. In the words of Sister Pollard, quoted by Dr. King on March 25, 1965 in Montgomery, Alabama in a speech titled *Our God is Marching On!*, I will be able to say "My feet are tired, but my soul is rested." I will close my essay with another powerful message delivered by Dr. King in that same speech, a message that I will always strive for, hopefully not alone:

The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy that recognizes the dignity and worth of all of God's children. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy that allows judgment to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy of brotherhood, the normalcy of true peace, the normalcy of justice.