



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

# Los Angeles teachers organize to support Palestine

written by Palestinian Youth Movement

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Black-Brown Solidarity with Palestine rally in Los Angeles, May 22. Photo: Insook Lee

We are grateful to the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) educators who drafted and passed area motions in support of the people of Palestine. This motion builds on UTLA's history and tradition of commitment to educational equity and racial justice. In standing with Palestinian educators and students, you will affirm the right of young people to grow up and learn in an environment free of surveillance, over-policing, and military occupation. In rejecting the systematic treatment of

Palestinians as second-class citizens within their own schools, you will take a stand against racism and discrimination that Palestinian students and educators face every day because of their national origin. Your position will send an important message to today's youth who will go on to become the leaders and decision-makers of tomorrow.

Education is not a neutral force in young people's lives, but an active agent of change that has a profound effect on students' worldview and moral compass. This motion — if passed — will help call attention to that fact. Israel has violated numerous international human rights laws and has been officially designated as an apartheid regime, including by Human Rights Watch and Israeli human rights organization B'tselem. In the past month, entire apartment buildings in Gaza have been leveled in seconds, with entire families being wiped out in single airstrikes. The direct link between our taxes and Israel's military makes these atrocities possible, demonstrating U.S. complicity and our responsibility as citizens to stand against this injustice.

The U.S. currently sends \$3.8 billion taxpayer dollars in military funding to Israel every year. Just a few weeks ago, President Biden signed off on a \$735 million weapons deal with Israel as the heavy bombardment of Gaza was taking place. As our besieged people in Gaza continue to suffer under the fire of bombs and the misery of the blockade, that same injustice is being funded — indeed, single-handedly being made possible — by the taxes we filed this month. Those are tax dollars that could be going to health care, public education, mental health services, housing or a host of other services that are helping to build communities up rather than engage in endless warfare or further the engineered suffering inflicted against Palestinians by the Israeli occupation.

For too long, friends and allies of Palestine have had accusations of anti-Semitism leveled at them for taking a stand on Palestinian rights. These false accusations rely

on a disingenuous conflation of Israel and Jews that is intended to silence and criminalize Palestinians by portraying their resistance to occupation and ethnic cleansing as a form of bigotry or irrational hatred. This tactic is intended to stifle speech critical of Israel when its brutal actions are, on their own terms, indefensible. It is not anti-Semitic to criticize the state of Israel for its acts of military aggression and its ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people. Taking a principled moral stance on a situation of clear injustice is in no way a form of racism or prejudice as has been alleged. There is a critical difference between criticizing Israel as a violent nation state and attacks on Jewish people because of their identities. Anti-Semitism makes a home in white supremacy, not in a grassroots movement for justice for all.

Many Palestinian students and their families in our schools are affected by the censorship and silencing around Palestine. Not only are they constantly silenced for speaking about Palestine: they are told within the classroom setting that their country does not exist and frequently find themselves confronting racist stereotypes about Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians, which often have a direct and lasting effect on their mental health and school performance. As their families are directly impacted by this disparate treatment, it is important that teachers support them, especially while they are grieving and dealing with horrific violence inflicted upon their relatives in Palestine.

In the spirit of maintaining UTLA's commitment to an equitable workplace for teachers and students alike, this motion is a gesture toward the same values of dignity and self-determination upon which the union was originally founded in 1970. Born out of a strike and tax revolt, UTLA's early years were rooted in a commitment to racial and economic justice that pushed back against unjust taxation and teachers' vastly inferior bargaining power in California. A vote in favor of this motion would build on that history and extend the same key concerns internationally, where much of our tax dollars go.

The Palestinian Youth Movement would be honored and humbled to support UTLA in any way possible, in expressing support for Palestine and in passing this motion. Many other educational organizations around the world — including the National Union of Teachers in Europe and San Francisco Teachers Union — have already taken a vocal stance in support of the Palestinian people and against Israeli apartheid and occupation. We are immensely grateful to see that UTLA, a union that consistently takes stands for justice and for the communities of Los Angeles, is on a path to joining them. We extend our deepest gratitude to you again.

**Palestinian Youth Movement - Los Angeles-Orange County-Inland Empire Regional Chapter**

