



**Open Letter to Portland City Council Members from
Jewish Voice for Peace Portland and Jewish Palestinian Alliance of Oregon**

**Follow Up from City Council Hearings of Thursday 9/3/26
Concerning The Human Rights Screen**

Dear City Councilors:

We are writing as members of Portland's Jewish community following the September 3rd City Council hearing on the proposed human rights screen. We believe it is important to correct the record and bring the conversation back to the policy before the Council: establishing a principled, universal standard for the investment of Portland's public dollars.

The written and oral testimony presented at the hearing made clear that this issue is not about any single country or conflict. Testifiers addressed corporate complicity in climate destruction; constitutional overreach and violations of privacy through surveillance within our communities; the surveillance and repression of people exercising their First Amendment rights through protest; and ICE actions involving the arrest, detention, and deportation of our neighbors without due process. Testifiers also spoke about atrocities corporations have aided, abetted, and profited from in Myanmar, the Philippines, Sudan, Congo, and Palestine/Israel. This is not an exhaustive list.

The proposed screen would be universal. It would be based on well-established criteria for international human rights and a comprehensive assessment of corporate behavior. No company or nation would be singled out for unequal scrutiny, and none would be excluded.

Yet the focus of the September 3rd hearing shifted away from this core issue. Members of the public opposing the policy, as well as Councilors Zimmerman, Pirtle-Guiney, and Smith, characterized this broad-based testimony as antisemitic and claimed that Israel was being singled out. Those accusations are false. **The issue before the Council is whether Portland should apply a universal human rights standard to the investment of its public dollars.**

Behind the Councilors' accusation was the implication that those of us who support the human rights screen are pursuing a hidden agenda to target corporate complicity in Israel's violations of human rights. Let us be clear: it is no secret that we wish to divest from Israel's war machine, which is currently violating international law to slaughter civilians. The reason we

condemn the State of Israel's occupation of Palestine is *because* we do not believe any nation should be exempt from or above international law. We hold corporations doing business with Israel to the same standard as those involved in human rights violations in places such as Myanmar, the Philippines, Sudan, Congo, and, for that matter, here in the United States. In fact, the only people singling Israel out are the Councilors opposing this screen; if they do not want Israel on the list of countries violating human rights, then they should join us in organizing to stop Israel's genocide in Gaza and ethnic cleaning and violence in the West Bank.

As Jews, we were taught from a young age the values of *tikkun olam*, the obligation to repair the world, and *tzedek*, the pursuit of justice. Justice is not a value we get to switch on and off depending on who is affected or which government is involved. Our support for a universal human rights screen is rooted in those values and in a vision for a better world where public dollars are used for the good and well-being of all.

Antisemitism is real and dangerous, as are all hate-filled ideologies, including racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and hatred toward LGBTQ people. We must oppose all of these interconnected forms of hate. Antisemitism must never be invoked to silence legitimate criticism of a government's actions, including Israel's. Doing so weaponizes antisemitism. It does not protect Jews. It empties the word of its meaning and makes it harder to identify and combat antisemitism when it actually occurs.

We are outraged that false charges of antisemitism have been weaponized to oppose a universal human rights screen. Jewish safety cannot come at the cost of the safety of others. Our Jewish tradition calls us to pursue justice consistently, and our communities are safer when all communities are safe.

When corporations place profit over the public good, we count on our elected leaders to hold them to a higher standard, especially when our public dollars are involved. Stewardship means good fiscal management, but it also means *tikkun olam* and *tzedek*.

We urge the City Council to return its focus to the policy before it and move forward with a comprehensive, universal human rights screen for Portland's public dollars. We hope to work with all of you toward that goal.

Sincerely,

Jewish Voice for Peace Portland

The Jewish Palestinian Alliance of Portland