



Department for the Study of Religion
900 University Avenue
Riverside, CA 92521

October 24, 2023

Dear colleagues and friends,

With one of us as serving as faculty in UCR's Middle East and Islamic Studies program, and the other the holder of the Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies on our campus, we've decided to reach out about recent events initiated on October 7th in Gaza and Israel. All of us clearly understand that the conflict has far deeper historical and sociological roots. We also know that 'conflict' is a euphemism for violence and death, and we observe grievous inequities acting as causes. We've heard some of our colleagues blame colonialism, some capitalism, some racism, as well as a host of other legitimate lenses with which to view matters. Often we find ourselves agreeing with these perspectives. Sometimes we don't. Indeed, we don't always agree with one another. That's the point of the university.

Together we have been running a recurring event entitled "Israel & Palestine: Possible Futures," offering a venue for knowledgeable people from all points of view to speculate about real needs, realistic steps, and possible positive directions toward more equitable and humanitarian conditions in the region. If you have ideas for this framework, please reach out. The primary purpose of this note is to offer our services in dialogue. If you are interested in either of our perspectives in discussion, we are here to do that.

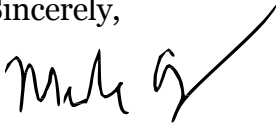
Here, in brief, we wish to relay some of our thoughts regarding the discussion of Jews and Israel as well as Islam and politics on the college campus. For the past quarter century, at UCR and elsewhere, we have taught such subjects as the Holocaust, the State of Israel, the Middle East, the politics of Islam, antisemitism, and Islamophobia. You will be glad to learn that students are widely interested in these subjects, and that their perspectives include every religion, every ethnicity, every race, every gender, and many nationalities from all continents, including of course Israeli and Palestinian students. Good students. These are often brilliant students. It is a sad fact that that on our campus they also sometimes need to be brave students. They come to think, to listen, and to ask questions of us as scholars and of one another. We don't always have very good answers for them, except perhaps the real lesson of all these exchanges, that God gives us two ears so that we may use them both.

If anything is obvious about the situation in Palestine and Israel, it is that we need at least two ears to understand what's going on. The groups are in this together. The demographic facts are straightforward. At least seven million Jews live in the region and aren't going anywhere. Seven million Palestinians live in the region and aren't going anywhere. Perhaps another three million Palestinians live in immediately neighboring countries. That's the basic political reality. Indeed, many of us see that the safety and security of these two sibling peoples — having been reared together for millennia,

intertwined as they are in their very DNA, let alone in their history — anyone can see that their security needs are hardly mutually exclusive. It is obvious that their safety depends on one another. This understanding is what we initially offer to our students, and so our exchange of ideas begins.

Finally, we should simply try to relay our hope that there are ways we may help our students understand the problems of the world without bringing those problems to campus. The work of using both ears isn't always natural or easy, but it can be taught. At least according to our way of thinking, this is our purpose as a university.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Alexander". The signature is stylized and includes a long, sweeping flourish that extends upwards and to the right.

Michael Alexander
Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Ali". The signature is simple and cursive, with a small dot above the "i".

Muhamad Ali
Faculty in Middle East and Islamic Studies
Program