

An Open Letter to Senator Tim Kaine: Stand up for the Student Protesters! No More U.S. Aid to Israel!

The humanitarian disaster rapidly expanding in the Palestinian Gaza Strip has captured the attention of the entire world. Those of us who live here in the country that is funding this carnage must speak out, now.

Last Dec. 18, local peace activists - Palestinian, Jewish, African-American and white - delivered an Open Letter to your office and that of Senator Mark Warner calling on you both to pledge not to vote for any more "aid" to Israel. The letter noted that, as of Oct. 23, "more than 5,000 Palestinians had been killed. The vast majority of these were civilians, including 2,000 children and 1,000 women."

Today, the number of dead has risen to more than 34,000. More than 77,000 have been wounded. Again, the vast majority of all these casualties have been women and children. This is not a war - it's genocide.

And yet, on April 30, in the midst of this carnage, both you and Senator Warner voted to send another \$26 billion to Israel. No expressions of concern over the suffering of the Palestinian people can cover this hypocritical act.

Students across Virginia have gathered to demand that their universities divest from companies that do business with Israel. In response to these peaceful protests, university administrations have called city and state police onto their campuses who then violently broke up encampments and arrested scores of students. The public comments made by you and Senator Warner have given a political cover to these attacks on free speech and the right of assembly.

Senator Kaine, this crisis is not ending anytime soon. Instead, it is escalating. And your response to it will have serious consequences in the next elections, both for the presidency and the U.S. Senate.

We demand that you immediately take the following actions:

- Publicly call on VCU President Michael Rao to meet with representatives of the student protesters, prioritizing the Palestinian and Muslim voices, to honestly and seriously discuss their demands;
- Publicly denounce the April 29 police attack on the VCU student protesters;
- Publicly support the student demand that VCU disclose all its financial and academic ties to the Israeli government, companies and educational institutions;
- Publicly call on VCU to divest from all Israeli companies and all U.S. companies with contracts with Israel and end all ties and ongoing programs with the Israeli government and educational institutions;
- Publicly call on VCU, UVA, Virginia Tech, George Mason and any other Virginia college or university to drop all charges against encampment protesters and immediately return the property that police confiscated from the encampments.
- And Senator Kaine, we urge you to finally find the courage to stand up in the U.S. Senate and demand "No More U.S. Aid to Israel!"