

## **SOMA Collective for Palestine: Official Statement on Israeli Soldier Protest**

On Sunday, January 26, members of the SOMA Collective for Palestine learned of a protest only after it had begun outside Oheb Shalom in South Orange, New Jersey. The demonstration, led by out-of-town activists, protested the temple's decision to host a laudatory event for an Israeli soldier—a representative of a military force responsible for ongoing genocide. That such a figure was welcomed into a local institution is appalling. Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers have [committed atrocities](#) against civilians for which there is ample video evidence, and several cases have been filed against the IDF in the International Criminal Court.

Over the past 15 months, Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians have [witnessed IDF soldiers](#) posting videos of themselves demolishing mosques in Gaza, burning Qurans recovered from abandoned homes, and using pages of the Quran as toilet paper. Having IDF soldiers welcomed in our town stands in direct contradiction to the “Hate Has No Home Here” signs that dot our community, and sends a clear message of disregard to Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab residents and their allies. For over 15 months, they have borne witness to genocide, only to see a local religious institution extend a platform to someone representing an organization actively engaged in their people's destruction.

A Jewish SOMA Collective member who witnessed the protest for approximately 30 minutes confirmed that there was no antisemitic signage or chanting. Police were on-site for the duration of their presence, and no arrests were made. Pro-Israel supporters obstructed traffic and hurled racist remarks, including “This is my community. Get out of my community,” directly targeting their comments at any BIPOC\* protesters.

### **Baseless Accusations of Antisemitism**

Rather than reckon with the disgrace of hosting a military agent of a genocidal state, the local pro-Israel supporters resorted to a familiar tactic: fabricating accusations of antisemitism against those who protested. This is part of a nationwide pattern—where legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and the IDF is deliberately conflated with religious persecution to silence dissent.

Let it be clear: the Oheb Shalom protesters were not protesting against Judaism or Jewish people. Had this event been hosted at another local institution, such as Seton Hall, it would have provoked the same outrage and condemnation. The only time our town has witnessed a protest at a Jewish institution was this time, when Temple Oheb Shalom decided to host an Israeli soldier who has participated in a horrific genocide. In similar incidents across the country, religious institutions have been used to further political agendas. For example, [CAIR](#) and [The](#)

\*Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color

[Guardian](#) have reported on events where stolen West Bank land was marketed for sale inside houses of worship.

### **Local Officials' Rejection of Palestinian Advocacy**

This hypocrisy is further reflected in the township's rejection of local advocacy. In March 2024, the townships dismissed a ceasefire resolution and outright denied that genocide was occurring, despite the conclusions of reputable global human rights experts. Activists advocating for Palestinian liberation and an end to the violence were demonized and targeted for their efforts.

A glaring example of this repression is the targeting of Black pro-Palestine activist Lisa Davis in South Orange. Following a peaceful rally on March 31, 2024, during which she and other protesters were harassed by an aggressive local Zionist, Davis now faces charges of "holding a special event without a permit" and "creating loud, continuous, or excessive noise." These charges are baseless and designed to stifle pro-Palestine activism—part of a broader pattern of suppression, even in ostensibly liberal areas.

Local Zionists are now exploiting the January 26 incident to advocate for our Township and the State of NJ to adopt the repressive International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which aims to further censor free speech by falsely conflating criticism of Israel and Zionism—the political ideology that undergirds [77 years](#) of systemic Israeli oppression, dispossession, and dehumanization of Palestinians—with anti-Jewish hatred. Stephanie Fox, Executive Director of Jewish Voice for Peace states, "Make no mistake: Legislating the IHRA definition is not about Jewish safety. The only thing it secures is impunity for decades of violating international law and trampling on Palestinian human rights." The ACLU states, "the IHRA definition of antisemitism is not rooted in the legal protections against hostile environments and instead seeks to prohibit speech based on viewpoint alone."

### **Double Standards**

Meanwhile, in Millburn, South Orange-Maplewood, and neighboring towns, this double standard is clear. Pro-Israeli synagogues receive standing police protection, yet no such safeguards were provided when Green Door Studios was picketed and targeted online by Zionists. The town has failed to protect peaceful protesters for over a year, despite repeated incidents of harassment—including cigarettes being thrown at demonstrators and cars deliberately threatening their safety. Pro-Palestine protesters have recognized their own neighbors as the perpetrators of harassment against them.

Our township officials have issued immediate statements, without fact-checking, whenever pro-Israelis in town feel threatened. Yet, they remain silent as misinformation and propaganda spread, endangering local Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians, and their allies—who have repeatedly and openly been called “terrorists” and “rapists” by the pro-Israeli side. This pattern continues without a word of concern from our leadership.

Additionally, pro-Palestinian voices on local social media face relentless harassment, both publicly and in their direct messages, where they are subjected to slurs, threats of violence, and intimidation over their jobs. Many of us have been warned that "lists" are being compiled of those who even click ‘like’ on pro-Palestinian posts. The ongoing harassment, doxxing, and threats are clear attempts to silence us.

Local anti-Zionist Jews have not been spared from harassment, with some even losing their jobs due to their political views. Religious or spiritual identity offers no protection—only adherence to the prevailing Zionist narrative on Israel/Palestine serves as a safeguard. Notably, nearly half of the active members of the SOMA Collective for Palestine are Jewish, affirming the distinction between Zionism and Jewish identity.

The facts are undeniable. On December 5, 2024, Amnesty International published a damning 293-page report declaring that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. The report meticulously documented war crimes carried out by the IDF. [Read the report here.](#)

This live-streamed destruction of Gaza has obliterated Israel’s moral standing. Zionists have lost the moral argument—and their only recourse is to try to crush those who dare to speak the truth.

Despite these relentless attempts to intimidate and silence us, we refuse to be deterred. As citizens of a country that has funneled billions of our tax dollars into Israel’s genocidal and brutally oppressive [apartheid](#) regime—while Americans struggle without basic services—we will continue to speak out. We will not be silenced in our fight for Palestinian freedom, equality, and dignity.