

Safety concerns expressed to Council amid calls for peace in Middle East

When Shaheen Moledina first moved to Aurora with her family, she said it felt like a scene on a Hallmark Card. But recent events in the Middle East have challenged that bucolic feeling she once so enjoyed.

This was the message Moledina of Active Minds Activity Centre delivered to local lawmakers last week as she called on Council to make a statement on the Israel-Hamas war.

'After living here, I saw why our slogan is 'You're in Good Company,' [but] lately we've lost our way and not everyone feels safe,' she said. 'As Muslim residents and parents, we want to convey our sincere condolences to those families who we know have deep kinship with citizens living in Israel. The ongoing occupation and cycle of violence in Israel and the Gaza Strip has led to enormous and senseless tragedy and suffering on both communities. It doesn't escape us that these events are also taking place during Islamic Heritage Month, which offers Canadians an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of Canada's Muslim communities. We wonder if you might be open to use this moment as an approach to model the community that hate has no place in Aurora.'

'Whether you're Jewish, Muslim, of another faith, or none, we know our community is built on a legacy of trust, caring and compassion and there is perhaps no better time to demonstrate the spirit of cooperation. War is devastating and a painful experience, one that brings out the worst in humanity. It is during times like these that we must come together and rise above hate. Hate only perpetuates violence and suffering and it hinders any chance of constructive dialogue and peaceful resolution. In the midst of the conflict, it is easy for emotions to run high and for divisions to deepen. However, it is precisely during these challenging times that we must remind ourselves of our shared humanity.'

Behind the 'political rhetoric' are stories of ordinary people 'families and children' who are bearing witness to the brunt of the violence, she added.

'Stopping hate requires empathy, understanding, and willingness to listen to different perspectives. It means recognizing that for every human life is valuable, regardless of nationality, religion, or ethnicity. It means refusing to generalize or stereotype entire communities based on the actions of a few. We must also acknowledge that hate is not confined to the battlefields. It seeps into our daily lives, affecting our relationships, our schools, and our workplaces. It is also a responsibility to actively combat hate in all its forms; whether it is through promoting tolerance, acceptance, or engaging in peaceful dialogue.'

'We must not underestimate the power of unity. By coming together as a community, we can show that hate will not divide us. We can support initiatives that promote dialogue, understanding, and peace-building efforts in Gaza and beyond. Stopping hate is not an easy task. It is a necessary one [that] requires a collective effort from every member of our community. Let us stand together shoulder to shoulder and work towards a future where hate has no place. Only then can we pave the way for a better, more harmonious world' or perhaps this could be done in the form of having a Jewish person and a Muslim person present a united front in condemning hate and violence at a community event where the Koranic view on violence could be highlighted, or perhaps it could take place in assurance that events in Israel and Gaza are communicated to residents with proper historical context and nuance.'

Leaders, she insisted, need to 'stand for peace in the region for Jews and Muslims', she continued, and called on Mayors and Councillors to 'demand a ceasefire so no more children and civilians die on both sides.'

Responding to the delegation, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said it was 'very brave' to come forward to talk about 'a subject that had a lot of uncertainty within communities.'

'We have had several phone calls from not only close friends but constituents in the community that feel the same way that you do, of feeling unsafe or uneasy, stress, anxiety,' she said. 'It's clear that there is, unfortunately, a lot of angry people, hateful, inciteful, and I think we do need to stick together and deny inciteful speech and hate in the community and really focus on peace and unity and love.'

?We should be looking towards a peaceful environment as far as what is going on around the world, which isn't just beholden to the Middle East. There are lots of things going on around the world. It is unfortunate and all we can do is support where we can and hopefully encourage people to stand together in peace and unity so we don't cause any further disdain or unsafe feeling in the community. We need to grow together.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter