

Council to fly the Palestine flag for a day

Green councillor Chas Booth, put forward a [motion](#) to Council today arguing that the City Council should fly the Palestinian flag as a gesture of solidarity with the ordinary people of Gaza. This is what he said in support:

“Let me start by saying that I support and welcome everything in the Leader’s motion on the subject of Gaza. Indeed, in some ways, it is more comprehensive than my own motion. The horrendous loss of life and ongoing violence in Gaza is something we simply cannot ignore.

“We cannot sit on our hands.

“And while the influence of The City of Edinburgh Council in such matters is small, it is not completely insignificant. Time after time those caught in conflict tell how much it mattered to have support from abroad, however faintly heard.

“Making our views clear to the Israeli Consul and the Palestinian President is the least we can do in the face of the continuing deaths of innocent civilians including many women and children in Gaza.

“And we should, of course, do what we can to assist the victims of this violence, through the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. The proposal to fly the DEC flag is one we support. So, I support the Leader’s motion with the indication, as stated to the leader, that the Palestinian flag will be flown for one day.

“That is because there is one element of my [motion](#) which has provoked some debate and, while it is symbolic, I believe that it is an important symbol. And that is the flying of the Palestinian flag from the City Chambers.

“Only a few months ago, in December, the council chambers paid tribute to Nelson Mandela. It was one of those occasions where local politics rises above party differences and where there was a great deal of pride in the recognition that the capital had given to Mr Mandela at a time when he was languishing in prison and branded a terrorist in some quarters.

“Time erases differences and gives perspective. Back in the 1980s when Edinburgh was acknowledging Mr Mandela there were plenty of people ready to snipe at the city’s stance, ready to argue that it was petty tokenism, to say that a small city like Edinburgh had no business in international affairs. That it was a “complicated situation” in South Africa and that we should avoid taking sides.

“These arguments seem absurdly myopic now. Of course there is complexity. But there is still right and wrong. Racism is wrong. Anti-semitism and islamophobia are wrong. And the killing of innocent civilians, including many children, is wrong.

“That’s what I feel about what is happening in Gaza just now. Do I believe it is acceptable to fire rockets into Israel? Of course not. In coming to a resolution in the Middle East there will be negotiation and compromise for all parties. But this is not a conflict of equal powers – the death toll tells its own story. 67 Israelis have died, the majority of them soldiers. And over 2,000 Palestinians, the vast majority of them innocent civilians.

“This is the awful consequence of the disproportionate use of force.

“That is why I put forward this motion, seeking to fly the Palestinian flag in light of the continuing tragedy in Gaza. Of course, there is no monopoly on suffering and anguish but it is to recognise that ordinary people in Gaza have borne the brunt of conflict and in seeking to fly the flag we are

seeking solidarity with them.

“With the ordinary people of Gaza.

“The Palestinian flag represents the Palestinian people – not one political group or faction within Palestine but the whole people. It has been used in diplomatic and state occasions all over the world since 1964. Indeed, as recently as July last year the Palestinian flag flew in the Knesset to mark the visit of a group of Palestinian Authority delegates. If it is good enough for the Israeli Parliament, why is it not good enough for our own city chambers?

“The City Chambers has seven fixed flagpoles and five portable ones, so there is plenty of space to fly both the DEC flag and the Palestinian flag side by side if we so choose. In the face of the horrendous loss of life and disproportionate violence in Gaza, it is essential we do what we can to express our solidarity with the innocent victims. Flying the flag of those who are overwhelmingly the victims in this conflict would be one way to show our solidarity.

“That is why I put forward the motion and why I am pleased the Capital Coalition has accepted that principle and agreed to fly the flag of Palestine for one day.

Councillor Chas Booth is the Green Councillor for Leith.

The council had earlier heard from representatives of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Association of Palestinian Communities in Scotland.

Albie O'Neill who appealed to the council on behalf of SPSC said after the meeting, “The flying of the Palestinian flag above the city chambers in Scotland's capital sends a message to the world that Edinburgh stands with the people of Palestine. Alongside its support for the humanitarian appeal for Gaza, Edinburgh council is continuing its proud tradition of supporting the oppressed peoples of the world. Thirty years ago support was given to the people of South Africa, today it is the people of Palestine. This is a proud moment for the

city of Edinburgh.”

Wael Shawish of the Association of Palestinian Communities in Scotland had earlier told the full council of the horrors of living under occupation. He said “Palestinians will be heartened by this fantastic show of solidarity. At a time when the people of Gaza face continuing attacks, this small gesture from the capital of Scotland gives them hope, hope that the pressure from across the world will help bring about a lasting peace which can only be realised by the establishment of a free and democratic Palestinian state.”

