

Sheffield City Council issues a “A Cross-Party Statement of Solidarity” - but with whom?

On March 6th this year, the Sheffield Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid presented a petition of 7,500 signatures to a Full Council meeting. In the debate which followed, Councillors were denied the opportunity to vote on this petition, as we have reported in the [Newsletter of March 7th](#). Instead of addressing the petition on that day, when all our Councillors could determine the outcome, the petition was deferred and will be discussed in a Strategy and Resources Committee at a time yet to be determined.

In the interim, the Leader of the Council, Tom Hunt offered to produce a cross-party statement as happened in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At that time, Sheffield City Council issued [a clear statement of support](#) for the Ukrainians and devoted several pages on their website to initiatives to support the Ukrainian people and their cause.

Ukraine and Sheffield Council

Sheffield’s political position on Ukraine, as reflected on the Council’s website, shows the city’s leadership unequivocally taking the side of the people they identify as victims. The title of the statement the Council issued names both the aggressor as they see it and the offence “*A statement in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine*”. The language conveys moral and political certainty: “*We stand with them (Ukrainians) and against the bullying tactics of the Russian State and the **unimaginable military aggression** that Ukraine is now facing.*”

There is no attempt to introduce a political “balance”, to consider an alternative analysis, nor the fact that some citizens may have different views of the situation – it is unqualified support for Ukraine. The final paragraph says: “***The Town Hall will be lit in the colours of Ukraine this evening; this gesture is to show our support and to show the people of Ukraine that here in Sheffield we will do all we can to be a light in the darkness.***”

Palestine and Sheffield Council

In contrast with its statement on Ukraine, SCC has now issued a “[Cross -party Statement of Solidarity](#)” – the question is “with whom?” Palestine isn’t mentioned in the title. SCC leaders cannot bring themselves to issue a statement explicitly in solidarity with Palestinians, “in response to” the genocidal attacks on Gaza, the ethnic cleansing, the collective punishment of civilians and the Israeli denial of aid - amounting to a policy of starvation as a weapon of war.

Why is this not “***unimaginable military aggression***” in the eyes of the Sheffield Council leadership?

Paragraph two of this cross party statement addresses Gaza’s suffering but fails to identify the agency behind that suffering. The leaders write about the tragic loss of lives, the ongoing bombardment and blockade, the prospect of starvation and over 30,000 who “***have been killed***” but do not name the state that is responsible for these actions.

The inclusion of a reference to October 7th in this paragraph and later a reference to the “hostages “(i.e. Israeli captives) with no reference to the 7,000+ Palestinian held captive in the West Bank since October 7th - is revealing. In common with much of the mass media, SCC leaders date the conflict from October 7th.

This position wilfully and culpably ignores the 75 year long ethnic cleansing, the 57 year long occupation and the 16 year long siege of Gaza. Such a lack of historical perspective shown by people who put themselves up as political leaders is difficult to overlook.

The only point which shows a hint of acknowledging the legal and moral imperatives of the situation is the recognition that Israel must obey the orders of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) the world’s highest court. So, Sheffield Council calls on governments to act in support of the ICJ. However, the word “genocide” does not appear even in this section.

This call, while welcome, ignores the influence and the agency which the Council itself possesses. At a time when hundreds of legal experts are calling on the UK government to stop its arms trade with Israel, Sheffield City Council continues to bank with Barclays. Barclays both profits from its investments in arms companies and supports arms companies by financing them. We are not aware of any moves by Sheffield City Council to exercise its powerful influence over the bank which services our city's financial transactions.

In conclusion, the statement issued falls far short of a statement of solidarity and unity with Palestine, in the spirit of the Petition, which its signatories and many others in the city rightfully expected.

NOTE: the authors of the Council statement were the four party leaders: Labour, Lib Dem, Green and Sheffield Community Councillors Group.