

Writing letters to the editor

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Chairman, SFMEW

Israel Advocacy Workshop

9-25-16

With thanks to:

CAMERA

® Committee for Accuracy in
Middle East Reporting in America

Resources (Thumb drive)

- Five Steps to Writing a Powerful Letter
- How to Recognize Unfair Reporting
- Making use of online comments
- Top 10 Letter Writing Tips
- Examples of letters to the editor



Keep Your Eyes Open

- Analyze the headlines
- Monitor the photographs
- Keep track of the op-eds
- Analyze the articles

Altered or fraudulent photos



Purpose of letters to the editor:

1. Responding to Bias or Inaccuracies in
 - a. Media reporting or editorials
 - b. Opinion pieces
 - c. Op-eds
 - d. Letters to the editor
2. Providing an alternative view of something claimed negative
3. Adding information
4. Praising the media when they get it right.



What is Bias?

- Factual errors
- Lack of balance
- Omission of important facts and context
- Double standards
- Editorializing in a news story

Lack of Balance

- Focusing on only one side's point of view
- Preponderance of space and/or time given to presenting a single viewpoint
- Proponents of opposing points of view given equal weight?
 - Both quoted directly? Or...
 - Is one side summarized and paraphrased while the other is expressed directly?

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Inside The Times

Rockets follow Israeli airstrikes

A warplane blows up a minivan carrying senior Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip, and Palestinians respond in kind. *World, A5*

- ◎ A warplane “blows up” a minivan but the Palestinians “respond”
- ◎ In kind? Did Hamas target military targets or civilians?
- ◎ Senior Hamas “militants,” not “terrorists”

Omissions

– Missing important facts and context:

- 10-month settlement freeze
- Previous offers of statehood
- Egypt controls a border with Gaza
- Thousands of rockets and missiles from Gaza
- Palestinian media incites hatred of Jews
- Many, many more

Double Standards




- One group is singled out for more criticism
 - Gender segregated buses in Israel condemned
 - State-sanctioned discrimination against women in Arab countries ignored
- Different terms used to describe the same phenomenon
 - Perpetrators of atrocities against Americans called “terrorists”
 - Perpetrators of atrocities against Israelis called “militants”

Editorializing

- **Statements should be properly attributed, not the personal opinion of the reporter**
- **Loaded terms and emotional buzzwords:**
 - **Occupied Palestinian land**
 - **Illegal Jewish settlements**
 - **Arab East Jerusalem**
 - **Pre-1967 “borders”**
 - **Colonialism, apartheid, wall, ethnic cleansing, genocide**

New Mexican 9/23/16

Israeli leader invites Abbas to the Knesset in U.N. speech

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Posted: Thursday, September 22, 2016 7:00 pm

Associated Press |

UNITED NATIONS — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu extended an unprecedented invitation Tuesday to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, urging him to address Israel's parliament.

Speaking at the U.N. General Assembly, Netanyahu offered in turn to appear before the Palestinian legislature.

The Palestinians quickly rejected the invitation as a "new gimmick" designed to mask what they described as Israel's intransigence on moving forward with the Mideast peace process.

"I am ready to negotiate all final status, but one thing I will never negotiate is the right to a one and only Jewish state," Netanyahu said. Netanyahu rejects a settlement freeze, rejects the 1967 borders as the basis for talks and rejects any division of Jerusalem. He has also said he would not uproot settlements.

What Netanyahu actually said:

You see, this conflict is not about the settlements. It never was.

The conflict raged for decades before there was a single settlement...And when we uprooted all 21 settlements in Gaza and withdrew from every last inch of Gaza, we didn't get peace from Gaza – we got thousands of rockets fired at us from Gaza...for the Palestinians, the real settlements they're after are Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv.



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The conflict raged for decades before there was a single settlement...And when we uprooted all 21 settlements in Gaza and withdrew from every last inch of Gaza, we didn't get peace from Gaza – we got thousands of rockets fired at us from Gaza...for the Palestinians, the real settlements they're after are Haifa, Jaffa and Tel Aviv. **Now mind you, the issue of settlements is a real one and it can and must be resolved in final status negotiations.**



Letter Writing Tips

Easy as 1, 2, 3:

1. Just the facts, please
2. Good things come in small packages
3. Tie it with a bow



Just the Facts, Please

- Choose the main point that disturbs you the most.
- Include the heading, writer's name and the main point you are refuting:

In George Smith's op-ed piece on January 15 entitled 'Israeli Policies Hurt Palestinians,' the writer incorrectly claims that Israel practices apartheid.

Good Things Come in Small Packages

- Be concise.
- Stay focused.
- Stifle emotions
- One central point is plenty:

This charge against Israel is false. Arab citizens have the right to vote. They have freedom of speech and religion. Arabs serve in the Knesset and the Supreme Court and have access to the best medical centers in the world. Apartheid is a system of racial segregation where one racial group does not have the same political, legal and economic rights as others. In fact, it is against the law in Israel to discriminate.

Tie it with a Bow

- Wrap up your letter with a last paragraph that underlines YOUR central point:

Israel's Arab neighbors practice religious and gender apartheid without any public condemnation. Only by addressing concerns where apartheid is actually practiced can the lives of the Arab people improve.

THAT'S IT!

- You're all done!
- Now that wasn't so hard, was it?



WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Bus explodes in Jerusalem, people taken away on stretchers

Bus explodes in Jerusalem

ASSOCIATED PRESS | 58 minutes ago in [World](#)



A bus has exploded in Jerusalem, and people are being taken away on stretchers.

Article continues below



(1 of 7) [« Prev](#) | [Next »](#) [Slideshow](#)

Palestinians carry a man, killed during an Israeli airstrike east of Gaza City, to the morgue of Shifa hospital in Gaza City, Tuesday, March 22, 2011. On Tuesday evening, an Israeli airstrike targeted... (Associated Press)

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Sharp Solar Cells

- ⊙ The bus “explodes,” no one actively blows it up
- ⊙ The picture shows a Palestinian from Gaza, not an Israeli from Jerusalem
- ⊙ The Palestinian was “killed,” his car didn’t just “explode”

Examples of Effective Letters to the Editor



SF Reporter, 4/6/16

The Anti-Defamation League (“ADL”) is a 103-year-old civil rights agency dedicated to stopping the defamation of the Jewish people and securing justice and fair treatment to all. We were shocked and dismayed to read the letter published on April 20, which expresses virulent anti-Semitism, hate and bigotry in the context of a protest against Israel. Political protest is protected by the First Amendment, and in the United States, even hate speech is constitutionally protected. For this reason, it is imperative to call out and condemn bigotry of all kinds when freedom of speech is used to advocate for hate.

Suki Halevi



SF *Reporter*, 4/6/16

The Anti-Defamation League (“ADL”) is a 103-year-old civil rights agency dedicated to stopping the **WHO** defamation of the Jewish people and securing justice and fair treatment to all. We...



SF *Reporter*, 4/6/16

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**Feelings
& interpretive
facts**



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Call to Action



Halevi - 2

The letter holds all Jewish people responsible for alleged “crimes done in the Jewish name,” describes “Jewish Zionists” and “Jewish Israelis” as “Nazis,” and implies that “Jews” are responsible for an increase in “global hatred for Jews.” Such unabashed bigotry is not a political protest against Israel. ... These are all hateful expressions of unbridled anti-Semitism.

Facts & Argument



Halevi - 2

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Conclusion

Legitimate criticism of Israel or any country is fair; **hate speech against Jews or any group of people is dangerous**. To use political protest as a vehicle for bigotry, **anti-Semitism and hate undermines** the efforts of all who support **peace** in the Middle East.



New Mexican 7/19/16

Gerald Rosen (“Breaking Silence,” Letters to the Editor, July 14) ignores the irrefutable fact that, in 1947, the Palestinian Jewish community, under the leadership of the Zionist movement, accepted the United Nations partition plan that called for the establishment of two states in Mandatory Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish. But the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states not only rejected the U.N. plan but started a war against the Palestinian Jewish community one day after the U.N. vote — on Nov. 29, 1947 — in the hope of aborting the emergence of the Jewish state and perhaps destroying that community...

Jacob Amir, MD



Amir, 7/19/16 - 2

...Had they accepted the plan and had not started the war, there would have been no refugees, their state would have been 68 years old today and thousands of lives, on both sides, would have been spared.



New Mexican, 7/29/16

Sometimes the bits and pieces of life come together to form a moment of clarity: for example, in the article by David Dishneau (“Deaf teacher’s quest for armed service inspires students,” June 26) about a teacher and students at the Maryland School for the Deaf who are preparing for service in the U.S. military. In the story we read that their model for service is the Israel Defense Forces which have “always recruited deaf volunteers.”

Joe Weiser



Weiser 7/29/16 - 2

There are over 100 deaf soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces, and it announced a “sign-language course to help commanders communicate better.”
Wow! Deaf soldiers ... computer geeks and nerds ... and autistic soldiers ... Women flying F-16s and leading combat infantry units ... LGBT contributions It seems to me that, in Israel, everyone is important ... I think we would all be better if we followed this plan.



New Mexican, 5/19/16

It is so refreshing to read something positive about the many wonderful things Israel does in the world (“Cyber oasis rises in Israel’s desert,” May 15). It is a great example of how Israel’s efforts help the world. Israel offers innovation and humanitarian aid far beyond any other country its size or in its situation, often being first in line, the most organized and the most giving when tragedy and needs arise throughout the world. Thank you.

Ruth Anne Faust



WSJ 4/26/16 – not about Israel, but short, concise, makes two clear points

While having his *en passant* handshake with Pope Francis, perhaps Mr. Sanders might have noted that he and his wife's own efforts at fixing inequality in 2014 was a 4% charitable contribution deduction on an income that places them in the top 5% of U.S. income-tax filers.

Halley S. Faust, Santa Fe



PRACTICE

Letter to the editor



**New
Mexican
6/30/16**

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2 Remaining

Palestinian teen kills Israeli girl

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Posted: Thursday, June 30, 2016 7:10 pm

By Josef Federman
AP writer

JERUSALEM — A Palestinian youth sneaked into a fortified Jewish settlement in the West Bank on Thursday, broke into a home and stabbed to death a 13-year-old Israeli-American girl as she slept in bed before frantic security guards arrived and killed him.

Writing to MOCs Practice

Gillibrand – Rounds Letter

Sept. 19, 2016

88 senators signed, including

Udall and Heinrich



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 19, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you prepare to attend the United Nations General Assembly, we write to address the issue of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. At a time of great challenges in the Middle East, we are disappointed that talks between Israelis and Palestinians remain stalled. The only way to resolve the conflicts between the two is through direct negotiations that lead to a sustainable two-state solution with a future state of Palestine living in peace and security with Israel. This outcome would provide Israel with greater security and strengthen regional stability. We remain optimistic that, under the right circumstances, Israelis and Palestinians can successfully resume productive negotiations toward this goal.

At this delicate stage the international community should both provide hope to the parties and avoid taking action that would harm the prospects for meaningful progress. Even well-intentioned initiatives at the United Nations (UN) risk locking the parties into positions that will make it more difficult to return to the negotiating table and make the compromises necessary for peace. The United States remains an indispensable trusted mediator between the parties, and we must continue to insist that neither we nor any other outsider substitute for the parties to the conflict.

Your administration has consistently upheld the longstanding U.S. policy of opposing – and if necessary vetoing – one-sided UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. As U.S. Ambassador to the UN, the Honorable Susan Rice summarized your Administration's position well when she exercised America's veto on a February 2011 resolution: "It is the Israelis' and Palestinians' conflict, and even the best-intentioned outsiders cannot resolve it for them. Therefore every potential action must be measured against one overriding standard: will it move the parties closer to negotiations and an agreement? Unfortunately, this draft resolution risks hardening the positions of both sides. It could encourage the parties to stay out of negotiations and, if and when they did resume, to return to the Security Council whenever they reach an impasse."

Mr. President, you also clearly stated in your September 2011 address to the General Assembly, "Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations – if it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians – not us -- who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them.... Ultimately, peace depends upon compromise among people who must live together long after our speeches are over, long after our votes have been tallied."

We could not agree more with these statements. We urge you to continue longstanding U.S. policy and make it clear that you will veto any one-sided UNSC resolution that may be offered in the coming months. Any such resolution, whether focused on settlements or other final status issues, will ultimately make it more difficult for Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the conflict.


Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand".

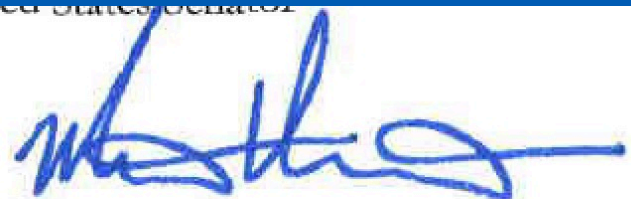
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Michael Rounds".

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Udall".

Tom Udall
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Martin Heinrich".

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Key points:

1. Thank you for co-signing the Gillibrand-Rounds letter
2. This is an important reminder to the President and his UN diplomats that one-sided resolutions in the Security Council are detrimental to peace.
3. Appreciate your ongoing support for a strong US-Israel relationship.

FYI: In April 394 House members signed a similar letter (Lowey-Granger), including Lujan and Lujan-Grisham.

