



Boulder City Council
1777 Broadway St.
Boulder, CO 80302

7 December 2016

Honorable Members of Boulder City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Sister Cities International's perspective on this important resolution facing the council. My name is Adam Kaplan and I am Vice President of Sister Cities International, the national association of sister city programs representing over 560 U.S. communities with more than 2,300 partnerships in 150 countries. We were founded in 1956 by President Eisenhower to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation—one individual, one community at a time, and while we are a nonpartisan nonprofit, we are also a traditional partner of the U.S. State Department.

Sister city exchanges, and the sister cities model in general, are predicated on a few simple yet powerful precepts: that peace is built through mutual respect, open communication, cooperation, and long-term engagement—one individual, one community at a time, and that communication is necessary *because* of our differences, not in spite of them. In traditional diplomacy countries present policies or viewpoints that are the formal position of the national government; in citizen diplomacy we recognize that all societies are composed of a mosaic of views across a spectrum, and that engagement with all parts of society is needed to build understanding and trust.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify a few characteristics regarding sister city relationships. Some have expressed concern that Nablus does not share the same progressive values as Boulder. I would like to emphasize that a sister city relationship is not, and has never been, an explicit or implicit endorsement of the laws, values, ethics, or cultural practices of another community. In fact, throughout SCI's 60 year history, its greatest achievements are usually with countries with whom we have had the greatest differences, from Germany and Japan to China and the Soviet Union to Iraq and Afghanistan. Given the breadth and depth of differences between communities, if this standard of "shared values" was a prerequisite for sister city relationships then we would still be waiting for our first partnership. Indeed, if this standard were applied by other countries to the U.S., we might find that some of our own laws and practices would make us "unmatchable" in dozens of countries around the world.

I will not deny the valid issues raised by some related to mistreatment of LGBTQ residents and women in Nablus. But if citizens in Boulder are truly concerned about the welfare of these people, they should understand that cultural changes come about by engaging a community, not by isolating it. To tell women or the LGBTQ community in Nablus that you cannot form a relationship with their city because they are being mistreated would seem only to add insult to injury.

I am aware that Boulder's Resolution 631 requires a sister city to be based on "some common interests and characteristics important to both Boulder and the sister city," which I believe the activities of BNSCP have adequately proven. I would note that no community will share *all* interests and characteristics of Boulder, and the areas where BNSCP has focused—youth, education, and the arts—are indeed shared by both of your communities.

Lastly, some have suggested that the BNSCP could continue with its activities without formally establishing a sister city relationship. I believe this would be a grave mistake, and would actually run counter to the interests of those that propose such a scenario. The sister cities movement is in its 60th year, and has well-established principles which guide activities across all sectors. These values include a commitment to peace, a collaborative approach to engagement, a pursuit of mutual respect and understanding, a long-term commitment between communities, and a dedication to



providing an inclusive approach both at home and abroad. By having BNSCP inducted into this framework, they will be more accountable to living up to the values and standards that have made sister cities so well-respected around the world. In fact, one could argue that the fears expressed by those opposed to BNSCP—that it will become overly politicized, and that it will be divisive within Boulder—are less likely to occur if they are held to the standards of sister city relationships.

For these reasons, on behalf of Sister Cities International, I would stress that we have no objection to the establishment of a sister city relationship between Boulder and Nablus, with BNSCP as the group initially managing the relationship.

I would also like to add something of a personal nature. In recent years I've watched in horror as both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have seemed to spread throughout the world, and how in many places, including the U.S., they are now openly expressed without reservation. As the grandson of Jewish immigrants who fled the pogroms in Eastern Europe, as well as the godson of a Palestinian man from Jenin, both of these scourges weigh heavily on me. I count myself incredibly fortunate to have grown up in a family where the biggest arguments between a Jew and a Palestinian were about who had the honor of paying the dinner bill. Watching my father, Fred, and his best friend, Wasif, taught me much about the foundations of peace and friendship.

The idea that issues between Jews and Muslims are insurmountable, or that change must come before engagement, rather than as a result of it, is both cynical and counterproductive. I have had the fortune to travel to both Israel as well as the West Bank, including Nablus, and in both places I was treated with respect and kindness, and given a level of hospitality that I often wish we could emulate here in the U.S. In both places the acrimony that Israelis and Palestinians feel towards one another was in no way extended to U.S. visitors. My personal experience was that my Jewish heritage was not an issue for those I met in the West Bank, and as a guest Palestinians felt obligated to treat me with respect and ensure that I was both safe and comfortable throughout my visit. I would also add that the Palestinians I met felt extremely isolated, and were eager for any sort of engagement with people in the U.S.

I sincerely hope that the Boulder City Council will approve this relationship and take a brave step towards promoting peace and understanding. In today's world such voices are desperately needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Kaplan", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adam Kaplan
Vice President, Sister Cities International

Cc: Heidi Leatherwood, Assistant City Clerk