

U.S. city bans police training with Israeli Army



Durham, April 20 (RHC)-- The U.S. city of Durham in North Carolina has become the first city to approve a prohibition of military-style police exchanges between the Durham Police Department and foreign armies and security forces.

According to the activist coalition "Durham2Palestine," the group successfully pressured Durham's city council to stop police exchanges with Israel's Army.

“This is an important step towards divesting from militarization and over-policing, and investing in Black and Brown futures... I am proud to see Durham leading the way; it’s a huge victory towards a vision of safety and sanctuary for all,” Laila Nur of Durham For All said.

The measure was approved earlier this week after an intense debate in which opponents said it vilifies and singles out Israel, charging the proposal is anti-semitic. The Anti-Defamation League, local rabbis and Jewish groups condemned the statement and the campaign that prompted it in e-mails to council members.

The newly adopted policy aims to deter a current trend in U.S. cities, the militarization of local police which has been accompanied by the disproportionate murder of Black youths. Part of the adopted text

states: “The council opposes international exchanges with any country in which Durham officers receive military-style training.”

However, the initiative was organized by the Demilitarize! Durham2Palestine coalition. According to Mondoweiss “police exchanges between the U.S. and Israel explicitly offer U.S. police officers exposure to methods used against Palestinians that numerous international human rights groups say are discriminatory and lead to human rights violations.”

The militarization of police and use of heavy-handed tactics against protesters, especially in communities of color like Ferguson and Baltimore, have become a major concern for many in the United States.

In court trials, police officers have mostly defended their actions as a measure against the threat which they faced because the victims carried arms, but in other cases those shot dead even did not carry arms.

Some analysts have said that police brutality in the United States is directly linked to the training of Israel, which is training the U.S. police force with a mindset to become an occupying army.

This has been evidenced by the illegal use of lethal force by Israeli snipers against unarmed protesters participating in the Great March of Return, which started on March 30, Palestinian Land Day, and will last until May 15, the Palestinian Nakba, which meant catastrophe in Arabic and refers to the day the State of Israel was established.

A total of 36 Palestinian demonstrators have been killed so far by Israeli fire, including children and one journalist. Use of lethal force has been criticized by the United Nations human rights body, which has reminded Israel that lethal forces is only justified when there is imminent threat to life, a condition absent in the Gaza protests.

In this context, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has relaunched calls for a two-way military embargo against Israel, including police training and military exchanges.

According to Jewish Voice for Peace Executive Director Rebecca Vilkomerson: “The Demilitarize Durham2Palestine Coalition is leading the way as a model of how to build communities that value safety for all people. We are thrilled by this first win of the Deadly Exchange campaign, which is especially meaningful as a response to the ongoing targeting of unarmed Palestinians in Gaza and the call from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction Movement in response to end U.S./Israel police exchanges.”

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