



May 5, 2009

BY FAX ([530] 757-5323) AND FIRST-CLASS MAIL

Dr. James Q. Hammond
Superintendent, Davis Joint Unified School District
526 B Street
Davis, CA 95616

Dear Dr. Hammond:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the oldest pro-Israel organization in the U.S. whose leaders have included U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis and Rabbi Dr. Abba Hillel Silver. We were troubled to learn that a factually inaccurate map of the Middle East was posted at Pioneer Elementary School's 4th Annual International Heritage Day in May 2008. The map did not include any reference to the State of Israel; instead, "Palestine" was erroneously denoted on the map in Israel's place.

Even more troubling was the district's response after the factually inaccurate map was brought to its attention. It took the district almost one year to respond to the complaint (supported in writing by numerous members of the community) that had been lodged about the map, and that was only after the original complainant repeatedly prodded the district for an answer. The response should have been immediate, since there was little if anything to debate about what the appropriate response should be.

When the district finally responded in a letter from Pamela Mari, Director of Student Services, the response was shockingly misguided. While the district acknowledged that International Heritage Day is a school-sponsored activity and that the district has the right and responsibility to regulate how such activities are conducted, the district then veered off in a direction that was unjustified and inappropriate.

The response focused on whether the map in question "promoted a discriminatory bias." This is surely a concern. Leaving Israel off the map of the Middle East suggests an anti-Israel bias on the part of the map's promoter at the International Heritage Day event. Indeed, the promoter's animus toward Israel is clear; we understand that when confronted with the map's inaccuracy, she

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responded angrily that “the Arab world does not recognize Israel.” (This is false; Egypt and Jordan recognize Israel.)

But bias is not the principal issue here. The fundamental issue is whether the school district is going to permit and promote deliberately false information at school-sponsored events, in derogation of its duty to ensure that materials that are presented to students are accurate and not misleading, and that such materials are based on facts and historical truths, not someone’s bigotry or political agenda. The individual who presented the map is plainly unhappy that the State of Israel exists. But it is indisputable that the State of Israel does exist and that it is a sovereign nation among all the nations of the world. It is outrageous that the school district would even consider tolerating a map at a school-sponsored event that deliberately falsifies the truth.

If an individual believed that Great Britain should have won the Revolutionary War and that the United States should not be a sovereign nation, and then proceeded to omit the United States from a map of North America posted at a school-sponsored event and mislabel it as Great Britain, would the school district tolerate this deliberate falsehood? Of course not. Our country is a sovereign nation and a map that is used to inform students about North America would have to reflect that irrefutable fact. A map of the Middle East cannot be treated any differently.

We understand that the promoter of the factually inaccurate map did not provide the actual map to the district for review. Rather, she furnished the district with something allegedly similar, which the district did not object to; Ms. Mari described it as “appear[ing] factually accurate.” This assessment is disturbing because the similar map is also wrong.

Like the map used at International Heritage Day, this map omits any reference to the State of Israel; “Palestine” is designated in Israel’s place. Ms. Mari, on behalf of the district, attempts to justify this designation by asserting that the map is only labeling the West Bank as “Palestine” and not the whole State of Israel. But anyone looking at the map would perceive that “Palestine” is pointing to Israel generally, especially when there is no reference to Israel at all.

Even if Ms. Mari’s view of the map is a plausible one, labeling the West Bank as “Palestine” is factually inaccurate. Ms. Mari outrageously asserts that “[t]he ‘West Bank’ and ‘Gaza’ independent territories of Palestine are recognized by the United Nations and the United States government.” This is false. Neither the West Bank (which has been known throughout history as Judea and Samaria, and has been identified by official maps and other documents by those names) nor Gaza is a territory of “Palestine.” Moreover, the United Nations and the U.S. government have not recognized either region as “independent territories of Palestine.”

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The United Nations (which can hardly be accused of bias in favor of Israel) has a Web site with maps of the countries and regions of the world. The UN's map of Israel (see <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/israel.pdf>) contains no reference to "Palestine."

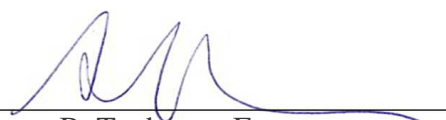
Likewise, the UN's map of the Middle East indicates Israel only (see <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/mideastr.pdf>). There is no reference to the West Bank or Gaza, and certainly no reference to "Palestine." At the present time, there is no entity or nation called "Palestine."

International Heritage Day is presumably an opportunity to educate students about different cultures and traditions, but not at the expense of the truth. When you consider Ms. Mari's conclusions on the district's behalf, we urge you to modify them so that they respect and uphold the district's responsibility to its students. Materials presented and promoted at school-sponsored events, both in and out of the classroom, must be accurate. We understand that district-wide guidelines are going to be issued for all school-sponsored activities, including International Heritage Day. The guidelines should also comply with this mandate.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to your prompt response.

Very truly yours,


Morton A. Klein
National President


Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice

cc: Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer
U.S. Representative Mike Thompson
State Senator Lois Wolk
State Assemblymember Mariko Yamada