



Friends United Meeting Statement on False Accusations (excerpt)

August 14, 2017 | Richmond, IN – On August 9, 2017, a radical group published an article with gross mischaracterizations regarding the Ramallah Friends School (RFS) and the Go Palestine Summer Camp. Two US Senators -- Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) -- have since requested that USAID – a funder of RFS initiatives -- investigate such allegations.

Through decontextualization and distortions, the article falsely portrays our partner institution as promoting “extremism.” FUM and RFS strongly reject the smearing attempt and all accusations linking any of our activities to the support, affiliation or partnership with extremist elements. The record is clear of RFS’ deep commitment to Quaker faith and values, as well as a firm belief in coexistence in the Middle East. The Quaker peace testimony, with pacifism at its core, undergirds RFS’ mission as a school community and lies at the heart of all RFS programming. The school teaches conflict resolution, opposition to militarism, the Holocaust, seeing the Light of God in every human being, and has a zero tolerance policy for violence. RFS has been nicknamed the “Oasis of Peace” by many of its friends and visitors. Peace loving individuals and organizations recognize, support and nurture our programs and encourage their growth, not attack them.

Friends United Meeting is a collection of Quakers embracing Quaker churches (meetings) and institutions across the United States and around the world. We have supported the establishment and running of the Ramallah Friends School, the Quaker school in Palestine, since 1869. The Ramallah Friends School launched Go Palestine seven years ago, bringing together 14-17 year old Palestinian diaspora youth and/or Quaker youth for a three week summer program each year. The main purpose of the program is to help these youth connect with their Palestinian and Quaker heritage.

We strongly reject reports stating that Go Palestine and RFS encourage campers/students to “hate Israel and idolize terrorists” as stated. Contrary to that, we encourage students to be open to other narratives and for those with the urge to act in response to the injustice and oppression they are living, we cheer their peaceful approach. We draw from history and give them examples of how liberation was successful through peaceful means.

The article in question, labels Go Palestine as “controversial,” and makes the defamatory accusation that the camp includes “lectures by militants, some with terrorist connections.” The article attempts to justify this allegation by citing the lecture that campers heard from Nasser Ibrahim, described as an “associate” or “affiliate” of a “terrorist” group. Go Palestine does not include radical individuals or groups on its itinerary. Nasser Ibrahim currently serves as Co-Director of the Alternative Information Center (AIC), a joint Israeli-Palestinian non-governmental organization. Campers visited the AIC to examine how Palestinians and Israelis

work together to further peace and co-existence. Ibrahim volunteered to speak with them and the camp director accepted his invitation. Ibrahim talked about the work of AIC; nothing that was inflammatory or that alluded to violence was shared. He also did not receive any form of payment from Go Palestine. It is precisely because of the Ramallah Friends School's commitment to coexistence that this informal talk with the campers was permitted to proceed.

Complete statement at <http://www.rfs.edu.ps/en/news/1502727315>

From: **Senator Ben Cardin - Do not reply to this message** <senator@cardin.senate.gov>
Date: Fri, Oct 6, 2017 at 4:12 PM
Subject: Re: Mail from website
To: pat.schenck3227@gmail.com

Thank you for writing me to share your thoughts about the Ramallah Friends School. I appreciate your sharing your comments on this institution.

As you may know, the Jewish News Service in August published an article about a summer program, "Go Palestine," run by the Ramallah Friends School in the Palestinian Authority. The article alleges that the summer program has hosted speakers that may hold and promote extremist ideologies. The Jewish News Service also alleges that guest speakers with direct ties to Islamist terror groups have frequented the camp.

My office was contacted by a Jewish News Service reporter because the Ramallah Friends School is a recipient of an American Schools and Hospitals Schools Abroad (ASHA) grant, from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The grant supports improvements to the school's energy efficiency, athletic facilities, and to renovate historic structures. Because I am a strong supporter of USAID and the ASHA program, I called upon the Agency to perform its due diligence in keeping with required oversight of all grantees, out of concern that USAID and ASHA program may come under political attack stemming from these allegations.

Thank you again for contacting me about USAID funding to the Ramallah Friends School. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me in the future about this, or any other matter of concern to you.