

Sarah McKinnon, Precinct 20

Chadi Salamoun's testimony to the Select Board on April 24, 2024 as a co-proponent of STM's Ceasefire Resolution.

Hello, my name is Chadi Salamoun,
(Address redacted for safety concerns)

I come here tonight and ask for your support through a very challenging time for my community.

I was born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 into a war. I came here at the age of 6 to escape that war - I had already experienced things that no child ever should.

My family and I escaped with our lives on multiple occasions, including when a bomb planted on our balcony ripped through our neighborhood. We fled. Our next house was riddled with bullets while we hid in a chicken-coop down the street. That chicken-coop was infested with rats.

I know I am one of the lucky ones. I got out. I did not see my brother and sister ripped to shreds by bombs. I did not lose a limb. I was not orphaned.

So, I am here to speak for all children who cannot currently escape this violence as I did.

I am here to speak as an impacted member of the Arlington community.

[personal traumatic experience redacted for safety reasons]

This experience and our experience here in America has taught us to be afraid and to stay silent. My family doesn't know that I am here tonight. They would be petrified. My name is on the warrant article, and I know that I'm exposing myself and them to danger. The longer this violence goes on, the more exposed we all are.

Throughout my childhood here and through the last 6 months, I've been called a terrorist and a sand n-word. In eighth grade, I was physically assaulted at a park because I was Arab. In February of this year, I recorded a parent threatening us with physical violence. I reported it to the Mayor, who is my employer, and the superintendent where this occurred, but no one spoke up to condemn this hate. On April 8, this parent returned and threatened my family with sexual assault. I recorded it.

It's the silence of good people and the silence of our leaders that hurts the most - not this guy threatening me. It's the silence that gives license for this behavior. I heard so many Arab, Jewish, and Muslim residents speak to this same pain during the Human Rights Commission Listening Sessions.

Why do we speak up when one group's human rights are violated but remain silent while another group is denied theirs? This part is hard for me. Being a member of a group that your country and community dehumanize or ignore, even in our darkest hour. This happens to Jews. This happens to Muslims. This happens to me, a Christian-born Lebanese Arab American who lives in Arlington.

I know I'm not alone in advocating for a ceasefire. Seventy percent of all Americans want a ceasefire. Eighty percent of Democrats want a ceasefire. I needed 100 signatures to get this ceasefire resolution on the Special Town Meeting Warrant. I spent my birthday collecting signatures, and collectively we gathered nearly 300 signatures in 1 day.

I've met people all over Arlington - people who aren't Arab or Muslim - who are deeply concerned that our tax dollars continue to contribute to the ongoing violence. People are afraid for their safety and they're afraid of what a regional war would mean for America.

This article doesn't ask you to condemn anyone nor to choose a "side." It asks you to recommit to our values that center humanity. It's a starting point where Arlington can help all impacted members of the community begin to heal. Throughout my life, one of my parents repeatedly told me to "be careful" and that I'm "exposing us to danger." This week, this parent admitted they were proud of the work I was doing, and that it was time to break our silence. I am asking all of us to break this silence together.

Thank you.