



# Message to the Community on the War in Israel

October 12, 2023

Dear Lawrenceville Community,

I have concluded that my lack of communication to the broader community on the war in Israel was sending the unintended message of ambivalence, or worse, lack of sympathy for the victims of large-scale terrorist attacks, indeed massacres, of civilians in Israel by Hamas, an organization classified by the U.S. government as terrorist.

Earlier this week, a public statement seemed bound to simply stir further controversy given the deep complexity of the circumstances, the importance of historical context, and kernels of truth embedded in many informed but diametrically opposed points of view. As Tom Friedman wrote in a recent article in *The New York Times*, “I’ve seen Israelis and Palestinians do a lot of awful things to one another: Palestinian suicide bombers blowing up Israeli discos and buses; Israeli fighter jets hitting neighborhoods in Gaza that house Hamas fighters but also causing massive civilian casualties.”

With this in mind, I have felt that it is important to avoid the impulse to simplify or to see the conflict through a limited lens. I have heard some in recent days, for example, refer to Hamas as “the resistance,” which suggests that Hamas represents and fights for the interests of the Palestinian people, which I believe is a misunderstanding if not an outright distortion. The Palestinian people, who have endured profound suffering over time, stand to lose tragically and massively in this war that others have instigated.

I know that some only see the Israeli perspective and dismiss any sympathy for the Palestinian people because they “elected” Hamas, and therefore they have brought this upon themselves. That position too chooses to ignore important elements of a much more complex situation.

Ultimately, however, there are fundamental aspects of this situation that must be condemned unequivocally and there are clear statements of conscience that must be made.

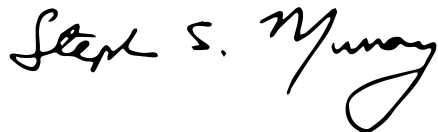
- We must condemn terrorist attacks against innocent civilians – attacks on any scale – but particularly the massive scale that has occurred in recent days – and that appear to be an ongoing feature of this war.

- We must pray for all in harm's way, especially civilians, and especially those least able to defend themselves.
- We must pray that leaders can get back to a good-faith peace process, where concessions are made and where agreements are acted upon.
- And, we must also take a stand against anti-Semitism, one of the most enduring, long-standing forms of hate the world has known.

Given the level of violence in recent days, a call for peace and negotiations may sound naïve to many, and yet I continue to feel it is the only way.

Here on our campus, consistent with our values, we can at the very least continue to act with empathy and understanding toward each other, respect for opposing views, and a sincere desire to demonstrate our ability to live well together in a richly diverse and inclusive community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen S. Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "y" at the end.

Stephen S. Murray H'54 '55 '63 '65 '16 P'16 '21  
The Shelby Cullom Davis '26 Head of School