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## **Racism in Kansas City Sister City, Ramle, Israel, Condemned by KC Sister City Association:**

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### **Ramle Civil Society Group Asks Kansas Citians to Do More To Assist Them in the Fight Against Israeli Racism**

In response to flagrant racism in Kansas City's sister city Ramle, Israel, the Sister City Association of Kansas City issued a statement on January 9, 2007 condemning the anti-Arab, anti-Muslim attitude of Ramle's mayor, Yoel Lavi, and declaring such an attitude to be incongruous with the association's mission of "promoting understanding between the people's of the world."

As reported in Kansas City's *Jewish Chronicle* on December 29, 2006 , hateful remarks by Lavi "were prompted by a request from a Ramle Arab citizens' group to change the names of some city streets that now have Hebrew or Jewish names to ones honoring historic Arab notables. One of the people putting forth the request was Jamal Salameh . . . When Lavi ignored Salameh's request, reporter Ron Feinreich of the Ayalon newspaper quizzed him about it. In an article published in late November, Feinreich quoted Lavi as saying the following: **'Why should I change the name, because Jamal wants to change the name? Because Ahmad wants to change the name? He should change his god. They all should go get (expletive deleted). ... If Arabs don't like it, they can go to Jaljulia.'** Jaljulia is an Arab village in the West Bank. Lavi also made this aside to Feinreich, which the journalist published: **'So have you, too, become the bitches of every (expletive deleted) Arab? What happened? Don't you have respect for the legacy of your own people?'**

In response, the Sister City Association of Kansas City, a 501(c)(3) that works with the Kansas City, Missouri municipal government to promote understanding and global cooperation with Kansas City's officially recognized sister cities, issued a statement reading: "SCAKC wishes to record its disappointment at the recent unacceptable remarks of Mayor Yoel Lavi of Ramle, Israel, a Sister City of Kansas City, Missouri. His comments and attitude are inconsistent with the principles of sister city relationships and hinder efforts to achieve the mission" of SCAKC.

This public condemnation follows the public remarks by Alan Edelman of the KC Jewish Federation, as reported in the *KC Jewish Chronicle* article, that the mayor's behavior called into question the philosophical foundation of the KC-Ramle sister city relationship. Echoing this sentiment and asking for even further action to be taken by Kansas City officials, was the Israeli civil society group, Mosaic Communities, which works in Ramle to establish integrated Arab-Jew communities that embody equality and eschew racism.

In a letter delivered on behalf of MOSAIC to the Sister City Association at their Monday night meeting and to the mayor's office, the city council, and the International office today, MOSAIC Acting Director Dr. Uri Davis and Acting Program Coordinator Hurriya Saadi confirm that the comments of Mayor Lavi are not aberrations, but instead reflect the policy of discrimination against Arab Israeli citizens in Ramle. The letter reads: "We submit to the Kansas City Sister City Association that the municipal authorities of the city of Ramle have failed in their responsibilities to attend to the needs of all sections of Ramle residents on an equal footing.

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"We further submit that the statements made by Mr. Yoel Lavi in his capacity as the mayor of the city of Ramle as quoted above accurately reflect the priorities and the style of municipal authorities of the city regarding its Arab population and Arab heritage."

Furthermore, the letter requested two avenues of additional action from its recipients in Kansas City. One, for the city of Kansas City to "reconsider its twinning programs with the city of Ramle, Israel, with the view to suspending the said programs until the completion of the review process." and, two, for Kansas City to begin "acting through independent **critical** Ramle civil society non-governmental bodies such as Mosaic house and Al-Dar."

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