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Israeli Arab City Councilman and Israeli Arab Rights Group Echo Requests That Kansas City Take a Stand Against Racism In Its Sister City Ramle, Israel Where "Apartheid Walls" Separate Arab and Jewish Israelis.

In two separate letters, each addressed to the mayor, the city council, the Sister City Association, and the International Office of Kansas City, Israeli Arab residents of Kansas City's sister city Ramle, Israel, have requested that the Kansas City government take action to oppose the racist remarks and policies of Ramle's Mayor Yoel Lavi and to support groups in Ramle working against such racism.

The letters, one of them from one of two Arab members of the Ramle city council, Fayeze Mansour, and the other from the Popular Committee of the Arab Residents of Ramle, known as the Al-Dar charity, come little more than a week after a similarly-themed letter was received by Kansas City officials from MOSAIC Communities, a Jewish-Arab civil society group that works for coexistence and equal rights for Ramle's Jewish and Arab population.

In December Mayor Lavi was quoted in Israeli press making an expletive-laced, racist tirade directed at Arab residents of Ramle [see attached January 10, 2007 press release and also the December 29, 2006 issue of the KC Jewish Chronicle]. Councilman Mansour wrote in his letter that "Despite repeated requests on various occasions, including my request voiced together with other Councillors at the recent meeting of the Ramle City Council held on 1 January 2007 – Mayor Yoel Lavi adamantly refused to retract his statements and deliver a public apology." The comments and the refused retraction "cause grievous damage and profound hurt to the dignity and the feelings of the Arab citizens of the City," wrote Councilman Mansour.

Both letters stated that the recorded comments reflect the underlying racist attitude of Mayor Lavi and are not just isolated, intemperate speech, as some have claimed, and that in addition to racist speech Lavi's administration advances racist policies that deny Israeli Arab citizens equal rights with Israeli Jews. The letter from Al-Dar went on to list a series of policies that support this claim, including, "calculated neglect of the Arab quarters of the City with regards to infra-structural development"; "erection of separation walls and fences, more properly referred to as **apartheid walls** and fences, around certain Arab quarters"; "demolition of homes" and "refusal to issue building permits" in Arab neighborhoods. "This list of the grievances of the Arab population," the letter continued, "is far from being exhaustive."

Given Arab grievances, Lavi's refusal to apologize for his remarks, and the unique sister city relationship between Ramle and Kansas City, Al-Dar requested that Kansas City "sever all contact with" Mayor Lavi while maintaining contact with the city council. Furthermore, on behalf of the Arab population of Ramle, the letter read, "We ask that in addition to the statutory requirement that you maintain contact with the Ramle City Council as a corporate body, you also develop direct contact with the two elected representatives of the Arab population of our City, as well as with civil society non-governmental organizations in the City" such as Al-Dar.

Councilman Mansour, in his letter, issued the same request that his Kansas City counterparts work with Arab citizen groups in Ramle "to empower the Arab population of the city," offering to assist the Kansas City government in contacting any of the civil society organizations in his city. He also asked them to "apply your influence on Mayor Yoel Lavi with the view to impress upon him the need to issue a public apology" and to "incorporate the Arab citizens of the City of Ramle in the projects sponsored by yourselves in the framework of the KC-Ramle Sister City relationship."