



23rd July 2025

Sent by email

Dear Mayor Garbett,

I write on behalf of the National Jewish Assembly regarding the proposal to end Hackney's longstanding twinning relationship with Haifa and the associated discussion of establishing a future twinning relationship with Ramallah.

We believe this proposal is divisive and contrary to the very purpose of town twinning, which exists to promote friendship, dialogue and understanding between communities, particularly during periods of disagreement and conflict.

Hackney's partnership with Haifa dates back to 1968 and, by the Council's own description, is a civic, non-political, non-sectarian and multi-faith relationship. The Council has also recognised the value of the healthcare partnership between Homerton University Hospital and Rambam Health Care Campus, which for some thirty years facilitated exchanges of nurses and healthcare professionals. Although much of this activity has understandably been interrupted by the Covid pandemic and the current conflict, that is an argument for preserving the relationship so it can be renewed when circumstances permit, not for ending it.

Hackney is also home to many residents who value this longstanding relationship, including members of the Jewish community, other people with family or personal ties to Haifa and Israel, healthcare professionals who have benefited from the links between Homerton and Rambam, and others who simply believe that dialogue is preferable to isolation. Their voices deserve to be given equal weight in this debate.

We understand that you have referred publicly to allegations of genocide and apartheid in explaining this proposal.

Genocide is one of the gravest accusations that can be made against any state. Yet the International Court of Justice has made no finding that Israel is committing genocide. Its Order of January 2024 concerned provisional measures pending a full hearing and did not determine whether genocide had occurred. As Judge Joan Donoghue, then President of the Court, later explained, the Court did not conclude that Israel was plausibly committing genocide. It is therefore wrong to present genocide as an established fact.

The allegation of apartheid is equally difficult to reconcile with Haifa itself. Widely recognised as one of Israel's most diverse cities, Haifa is home to Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze and members of the Bahá'í Faith. Rambam Health Care Campus employs staff from all these communities and treats patients according to medical need, while Arab citizens of Israel serve as elected representatives, judges, doctors, academics, police officers and business leaders. These realities sit uneasily alongside the suggestion that Haifa should be treated as a symbol of apartheid. Your party's assertion that "in Haifa, Palestinian people live under occupation and apartheid" bears little resemblance to reality. It

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stands in stark contrast to the city Hackney has twinned with for almost six decades and reflects a politically polarised narrative rather than an objective assessment of Haifa itself.

This proposal does not exist in isolation. It reflects a broader pattern in which the Green Party has repeatedly focused its international campaigning on Israel while showing little comparable concern for many other serious conflicts and human rights abuses around the world. That selective focus inevitably raises questions as to why Israel has once again been singled out.

A future twinning relationship with Ramallah need not be incompatible with maintaining Hackney's partnership with Haifa. If the Council truly wishes to promote dialogue and coexistence, it should encourage engagement with both communities rather than replacing one relationship with another.

However, should the Council pursue such a partnership, it should apply the same objective standards to every international relationship. The Palestinian Authority has not held presidential elections since 2005 or parliamentary elections since 2006. It continues to be criticised for restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, corruption, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, and the continued payment of stipends to convicted terrorists and their families, a policy repeatedly condemned by successive British Governments. Human rights and democratic standards should be applied consistently, not selectively.

Town twinning was never intended to be a reward for political agreement. Its purpose is to build understanding between communities across national, cultural and religious divides. If such partnerships are abandoned whenever political disagreements arise, they become expressions of political approval or disapproval rather than instruments of dialogue.

Ending Hackney's twinning with Haifa will not improve the lives of Hackney residents or contribute to peace in the Middle East. It will instead dismantle a community-led partnership that Hackney itself has consistently described as civic, non-political, non-sectarian and multi-faith.

We therefore respectfully urge the Council to reject this proposal and reaffirm its commitment to dialogue, coexistence and constructive engagement by preserving Hackney's longstanding partnership with Haifa.

Yours sincerely,

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