



I'm Vicki Fishman with the Jewish Community Relations Council. I am here today to thank you. For many months this board room has been filled with calls for you to weigh in on international affairs by calling for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas that began on October 7, 2023 when terrorists – followed by scores of civilians – stormed the Israel/Gaza border and massacred Jews, Muslims, Bedouin, Thai, Americans and other foreign nationals – killing over one thousand people in a single day and kidnapping more than 200 people. As you may have followed in the news, there is now a ceasefire – thanks to the Herculean efforts of the Biden and Trump administrations, working together in a rare display of unity across the American political divide. Only the negotiations of international powerbrokers could possibly have brought this outcome – an agreement that remains fragile and is in no way helped or influenced by local governments. So, thank you for letting those who are properly placed to do so do their work. As a result of this agreement, 18 hostages have returned home to Israel, including 5 Thai nationals and one American - Kieth Siegel who we saw the other day looking frail and starved. These hostages were kept captive over the course of almost 500 days in cages, tunnels, civilian homes, and United Nations facilities. They were deprived of food and light; they suffered beatings, deprivation and psychological torment – but these 18 are now home and can begin to heal. Over time we will continue to learn what they endured, while so many in the world and this boardroom lionized and excused their captors and tormentors. I cannot help but note that, despite the ceasefire, those who were calling on you to call for a ceasefire, continue to fill this boardroom, finding other reasons to demonize Israel and Jews who support Israel. Perhaps, then, the call for a ceasefire was really something else.

I must further note, that while the ceasefire holds and 18 hostages have been released, 85 hostages remain in captivity – held by Hamas in Gaza. Of those 85, 7 are Americans and of those 7, four are believed to have been killed in captivity. The Jewish community around the world, the region and here in Loudoun County holds its collective breath as we watch this ceasefire ploy, and our family come home. We thank you for not dividing the local community while we do so