

Letter: Chief Dr. Robert Joseph shares his thoughts on BDS



By Robert Joseph

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I understand that the UBC Club, Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR), has handed in a petition asking students to support an AMS Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) of Israeli companies.

As the current ambassador for Reconciliation Canada and as a member of the National Assembly of First Nations Elders Council, I believe that respect and open dialogue is the true path to peace and reconciliation. Fear and intolerance is defeated only when people come together to share their stories and to explore positive solutions to difficult issues. Unfortunately, this move can pre-empt communication and meaningful interaction, and thus foster animosity towards individuals of Israel and, by extension, all people of Jewish descent.

My belief is that, rather than bringing people together, boycotting, divesting and sanctioning shuts down dialogue and forces people farther apart. I believe that both Jews and Palestinians have the right to their own land, where they can safely live side by side in peace. And I believe that the only way this can be achieved is through reconciliation. Hillel B.C., a Jewish non-profit Organization on campus, endorses dialogue and believes that having conversations and being able to listen respectfully to each other's narratives is an important stepping stone on the path to peace. In fact, dialogue and respect are some of the only methods through which I believe that we can heal our world.

UBC must take the lead on establishing meaningful dialogue workshops that encourage our future leaders to have hard conversations and listen to each other's stories. In fact, as Canadians it is our responsibility to ensure that UBC, Vancouver and British Columbia are not only safe for all of our fellow brothers and sisters, but to also act as role models to the world.

Join me in my efforts to establish strong meaningful relationships that will help make our world a better place. The epicentre for the Palestinian-Jewish conflict will only grow to be imported or exported in an endless circle that will do no good for anyone if we fail to develop deeper understanding and, therefore, new relationships.

Please give peace and reconciliation a chance. We stand ready to assist in whatever way that we can.

With deep respect,

Chief Dr. Robert Joseph

Robert Joseph is a chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation who is currently Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada and a member of the National Assembly of First Nations Elders Council. In 2003, he received an honorary Doctorate of Law degree from the University of British Columbia.

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