

## Gaza Mayor to Address Edinburgh City Leader in bid to secure Twinning Status

**The Mayor of Gaza, Dr Yahya Sarraj, will address Edinburgh Council Leader Cllr Adam McVey, Depute Leader Cllr Cammy Day and the other 15 Councillors who sit on the Policy Committee when they meet to discuss the proposal to twin Edinburgh with Gaza City at their virtual meeting, to be held on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March at 10:00am. The proceedings will be webcast and the public can view what should prove to be an interesting morning. [by going to [Policy and Sustainability Committee – Tuesday, 29th March 2022 at 10:00am – City of Edinburgh Council Webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#) ]**

**Dr Sarraj holds a doctorate in civil engineering from a British University; he will speak for 10 minutes about what twinning would mean for his city. (profile at <https://mogaza.org/mayor-speech> )**

The proposal to twin the cities comes about due to a Council petition lodged by veteran campaigner Pete Gregson in January 2019, which secured 362 signatures, easily breaking the Council's threshold of 200. The petition was originally to be discussed by Committee in June 2020, but was postponed due to COVID.

The petitioner has been working on the bid for 4 years now and is hopeful of success. If the bid is successful, he aims to keep Council costs to zero by setting up the Edina-Gaza Twinning Association (EGTA) , which would be modelled on the Dundee- Nablus Twinning Association (DNTA). ( [www.dundee-nablus.org.uk](http://www.dundee-nablus.org.uk) ) Unlike Edinburgh, twinning activities there are not carried out by Council officers, but by DNTA volunteer activist members.

Gregson hopes to use the nascent Edina-Gaza Twinning Association to build links with Gaza schools, universities, hospitals and cultural centres. But one of his key objectives is to build employment opportunities for Gazans using the internet. Because, thanks to cloud computing, it is now possible for Gazans to deliver services over the internet, essentially using the net to beat the blockade. Which is why the second speaker to address the Committee will be of particular interest.

The Mayor will be followed by **Alan El-Kadhi, director of Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG)** and a UK citizen, also speaking from Gaza.( [www.gazaskygeeks.com](http://www.gazaskygeeks.com) ) Also speaking on the call with Alan will be **Rand Saafi; she is the Community Manager at GSG.**

GSG was started in 2011 by Mercy Corps ( [www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org) ) with support from Google, with the purpose of empowering young adult women and men in Gaza to earn an income online. GSG provides a suite of technical training programmes (coding, graphic design, and freelancing services such as online book-keeping, translations, voice overs) and supports employment connections for people to find remote work employment with overseas companies. Hence, they are extremely excited about the opportunity of building relationships between the communities in Gaza and the finance and IT houses of Edinburgh. This 3-minute video gives a taste of what they do: <https://youtu.be/T4o4otsoN6g> Entrepreneurship and Silicon Valley are themes.

The petitioner's main aim is to use EGTA to work with Edinburgh's IT and finance houses, making introductions to suppliers in Gaza such as GSG graduates, who could deliver an extremely cost-effective IT service, thus helping Edinburgh businesses save money and cut costs. And for the Gazans, helping them earn money, in a city where over half the population are unemployed.

The deputation from Gaza Sky Geeks will be followed by **Mike Whitehead, secretary of the Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association (DNTA)**; as noted, Dundee has been twinned with Nablus since 1980. The DNTA activist members actively seek out opportunities to link the cities. One year they took a fire engine to Nablus- and each year they train Palestinian fire fighters in Dundee. They are very active with schools and cultural connections. See the story of their twinning [on their website here](#). They have been helpful in suggesting what the Petitioner and his steering group could do.

The petitioner hopes to model Edinburgh's agreement on the successful one between Dundee and Nablus. He hopes to get, on Tuesday, an agreement for Lord Provost Frank Ross to sign a pledge with Dr Yahya Sarraj, Mayor of Gaza City, that would say the following:

*"The Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh and the Mayor of Gaza City wish to affirm a twinning treaty. By the affirmation of this treaty the cities of both Edinburgh and Gaza pledge that together,*

- They will actively co-operate to ensure the continuing development of close relationships between citizens.*
- They promise to facilitate the creation of direct links between institutions and organisations wishing to partake in twinning activity.*
- They will encourage exchanges between young people to ensure succeeding generations learn the history of the relationship between the cities and the role that each has played in its own national history.*
- They will take every opportunity to share skills and knowledge to the benefit of their respective citizens.*
- They undertake to convene regular meetings between representatives in order to evaluate co-operation programmes."*

He'll also ask the Policy Committee to allow the nascent Edina-Gaza Twinning Association (EGTA), to promote the twinning work. He'll explain that, like DNTA, EGTA would have places reserved for Councillors on its Committee (whose proxies could be Council officers), and would actively do the work of twinning. He'll explain that EGTA will, like DNTA, fall under the aegis of the Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network ( [www.twinningwithpalestine.net](http://www.twinningwithpalestine.net) ). There are 44 active groups across the UK, each working with partner cities in Palestine to provide support and promote peace, understanding and trade.

The petitioner says "I have set up around a dozen charities and organisations over the past 30 years; I think I would be equal to the EGTA task. And we already have a queue of people who want to help."

The Petitioner notes that COVID has, to some extent, strengthened his bid for two reasons: firstly, it is a well-know fact that Israel has triple-jabbed its Jewish population, but generally

deprived the Palestinians of access to the life-saving resources; secondly COVID has shown people new ways to communicate, wherever they are; **Zoom** and **Teams** allows people living in each city to work together and learn more about one another.

It's also important to recognise that Israel sees that twinning with Gaza as a threat to their hegemony; the petitioner's twinning website ( [www.twingaza.com](http://www.twingaza.com) ), tinyURLS and email account are hacked on a daily basis, sometimes successfully. The petitioner has been told by Microsoft to lodge a police report, which he has done. The proof of hacking can be seen at [www.twingaza.com/beware-tiny-urls-on-flyer-are-now-infected-with-malware](http://www.twingaza.com/beware-tiny-urls-on-flyer-are-now-infected-with-malware) which shows an example where users seeking to watch the Amnesty 15 minute video "Israel Apartheid Explainer" at [youtu.be/AUGICfaULXA](https://youtu.be/AUGICfaULXA) are being redirected to a pro-Israeli website instead.

Gregson has now contracted a professional US IT security firm to protect the website. Each day he gets reports for the many, many attacks they have protected him from. Clearly the stakes are high on this.

Gregson hopes the Council does not tarry on making a decision on twinning- for to do so, he thinks, will likely draw sustained fire from Westminster and Israel whilst the proposal is further considered- a simple yes or no on Tuesday is what he seeks.

The petitioner has already suggested to Councillors that, if they have 36 minutes free, they should watch the video of his rally at the City Chambers on the 26<sup>th</sup> March, with speakers Gregson and Mohammed Alshorafa from Gaza, at [https://youtu.be/MIkY8ad\\_9qs](https://youtu.be/MIkY8ad_9qs) (watch out for the Hamas Heckler [a Friend of Israel] a few minutes in).

The Petitioner foresees the Herald publishing a scathing denunciation of him next week as an antisemite and Holocaust Denier, as they did on the day after the Gig for Gaza he organised in Princes St Gardens in 2019. One can read about how he has to deal with such attacks in his entry in the Rogues Gallery of the Campaign Against Bogus Antisemitism's website – at [www.bogusantisemitism.org/rogues-gallery/#pete-gregson](http://www.bogusantisemitism.org/rogues-gallery/#pete-gregson)

In previous years, Gregson has lodged two other Council petitions:

Whistleblower Hotline 2013- successful- [A safer mechanism for reporting Edinburgh Council mismanagement](#)

(on Leslie Evans 2019, Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Gov)- declared invalid- [Investigate 1992 Video Funding Strategy Council Report](#)

Supporters in the UK and Palestine have prepared letters of support for the bid; 15 have been submitted to Edinburgh Council. Extracts are as follows:

"The Municipality of Gaza is the largest municipality in Palestine. It provides basic services to more than 1.2 million persons daily. It would be our honour to develop friendly relationship between your esteemed City Council and Gaza Council. It would be not only a symbolic action of respect and moral support, but also an affirmation of our mutual desire to live together in harmony and a step towards the creation of a better habitat for humankind."

- Dr. Yahya Sarraj, Mayor of Gaza City <https://mogaza.org/mayor-speech>

“The twinning of Edinburgh with Gaza will open opportunities for cultural, economic and social exchange. Most especially, this twinning will link the young Palestinians that we train in technology with Scottish organisations that seek high quality digital talent. This will benefit Scotland, and will be life changing for the young people in Gaza. It is an opportunity to shine a positive light on Gaza's growing tech talent while also raising international awareness of Gaza's daily challenges.”

- Alan El-Kadhi, Director, Gaza Sky Geeks [www.gazaskygeeks.com](http://www.gazaskygeeks.com)

“As a community organisation, we aim to realize our rights as Palestinians to control our resources for our own durable development for generations to come. Our mission is to mobilize and properly utilise resources necessary to empower a vibrant, independent and accountable civil society through community- controlled grant-making. Our community development approach focusses on the ecological, local economy, social and cultural dimensions. We believe that this twinning will create long-term partnerships between the two cities and open opportunities for communities to further engage in their development. This twinning will also create opportunities for youth and women to exchange resources and expertise among both cities.”

- Samar Awaad, Executive Director, The Dalia Association [Dalia Association -Palestine | Foundations for Peace](http://Dalia Association -Palestine | Foundations for Peace)

“Palestine Children’s Relief Fund fully endorses this proposal. Connecting Edinburgh with Gaza will help support and establish connections between the two cities helping to positively contribute to the quality of children’s lives in Gaza. With half the population in Gaza under 18 years of age, this type of global support is significant for the welfare and wellbeing of Gaza’s children. With the ongoing closure of Gaza’s borders, connection to the outside world is crucial for mental and physical health, education, future economic opportunities, quality of life, and overall success of the individual. Gaza’s children would benefit greatly from twinning the cities. It is our great responsibility to help improve their lives.

The Palestine Children's Relief Fund was established in 1992 by concerned humanitarians in the USA to bring injured and sick children for free medical care they could not get locally. We are the leading non-profit on the ground in Palestine providing urgent medical relief and humanitarian aid. In Gaza, we have built the first and only paediatric cancer department, and also have provided thousands of children free medical care they otherwise would not get. We hope this twinning of the two cities will bring more doctors and humanitarian volunteers from Edinburgh to Gaza to help provide children help.”

- Steve Sosebee, President & Founder Palestine Childrens' Relief Fund [www.pcrf.net](http://www.pcrf.net)

“Dundee Councillors in 1980 made a very difficult decision to twin and they faced considerable opposition.

Our links are very much about friendship, understanding and commerce; they are not about (party) politics. We endeavour to understand each other and we value the human bonds

which can be built by contact and hospitality. All Dundee City Council group leaders recognise this and have recently expressed their support for this twinning.

The origins of twinning after the wars in the 1940s were in bringing together those who had been in conflict. Twinning is by its nature often controversial or difficult but this is where it can be at its best. Building understanding is important to us all.

Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association would encourage any city wanting to establish links with a city in Palestine. Our experience, though sometimes facing difficulties, is very positive and beneficial.”

- Mike Whitehead, Secretary, Dundee Nablus Twinning Association [www.dundee-nablus.org.uk](http://www.dundee-nablus.org.uk)

“I have heard various official designations, such as ‘twinning’ or ‘sister city’ being mooted. The exact term is less important than building the connection between Edinburgh and the ordinary people of Gaza. They have suffered a humanitarian catastrophe in recent decades and a link between the cities that promotes awareness of their circumstances and solidarity between our populations is to be welcomed.

There is, in particular, scope for much greater links at the community level. Edinburgh is a festival city that thrives on intercultural exchange. We are also a great research city and our institutions and Gaza’s could benefit from each other. Gaza has great needs in basic health and education services and we are fortunate to be well-endowed in that area too.

I hope you will share my views on this subject and agree that action should be taken.”

- Tommy Sheppard MP (Member for Edinburgh East, SNP Spokesperson on Constitutional Affairs) [www.tommysheppardmp.scot](http://www.tommysheppardmp.scot)

“I write today in support of taking this opportunity to make a significant step in ending the international isolation of Gaza. I worked as medical volunteer in an UN-funded hospital in Gaza city in 1991-92 and was there on the first day of the Madrid Peace conference, which started the peace process leading to the 'Oslo Accords' and saw the hope and optimism of the Palestinians. Unfortunately, when I returned to Gaza in 2016, to help establish a Breast Cancer project, it was clear that life in Gaza had only become worse over the subsequent 25 years, rather than better.

Prior to the pandemic, I visited Gaza annually and saw the toll that the blockade takes on the delivery of healthcare as well as the economy and wellbeing of Gazans. It remains a challenge to get drugs in or patients out of the Gaza Strip and clinical staff are unable to attend conferences or training courses.

Indeed, ordinary people in Gaza feel that, unless they are dying in significant numbers, the world is not interested in their plight. We know that, when in prison, Nelson Mandela drew great comfort from having been granted the Keys to the city of Glasgow and I think this Edinburgh Twinning project could send the same message of solidarity to the people of Gaza.”

- Dr Philippa Whitford MP (Member for Central Ayrshire, SNP Spokesperson on Europe) [www.whitford.scot](http://www.whitford.scot)

“I write to respectfully request you consider and complete the twinning/sister cities with the Municipality of Gaza. I write as an elected official from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and previously, the former Moyle District Council in County Antrim. Prior to the review of public administration and the reorganisation of local government, we in Moyle were twinned with the City of Gaza.

The twinning agreement was an agreement between two sets of peoples. Its success was based on interested parties in each area making connections. The twinning operated by empowering volunteers to form a sub-group who then acted on initiatives agreed between the two jurisdictions.

Something worthy of note, the cost for the twinning process was entirely met by volunteers and no expense was incurred by the public purse. Moyle District Council had a titular yet essential role in establishing the connections.

The highlight of our twinning process was the visit of the Al-Halah kids football club to Ireland. Other notable projects included areas of study in environmental fields and tourism potential.

In conclusion, I would like to offer you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have on the opportunity before you and I will be happy to relay my experiences.”

- Cllr Pdraig Pearse McShane (Causeway Coast & Glens Council) (ex Moyle Council-twinned with Gaza in 2012)

“I write as Chair and on behalf of the Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network, which wishes to add its support to the proposal for a twinning link between the City of Edinburgh and Gaza Municipal Council.

We have over 35 twinning and friendship links between communities in Britain and Palestine. At our recent conference, a number of them reported on the very positive work that is being done to support their counterparts in the Palestinian communities. We particularly celebrated a recently created link between Hastings and Al Masawi in Gaza.

We also specifically discussed how, as an organisation, we might facilitate more links with communities in Gaza as it is the Palestinians in Gaza who are most disadvantaged and isolated.

The news that Edinburgh City Council is considering a twinning link with Gaza came as very welcome news to us and we hope you decide to go ahead with this project. It would help increase mutual understanding and would be of great significance for the people of Gaza. Should you decide to take this step, we would be happy to help in any way we can.”

- Tony Pearce, Chair, Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network [www.twinningwithpalestine.net](http://www.twinningwithpalestine.net)

“Setting up a twinning link with a place in Palestine is not easy, but thoroughly worthwhile. Britain keeps talking of a Two State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian impasse, but only recognises one of those states. Twinning is a way of beginning to put that right. Several years ago, the then Mayor of Derby went to Hebron - a city about the same size as Derby - to set up a twinning link. Since then, there have been visits in both directions and, during the pandemic, lots of zoom meetings and some fund-raising. We in Derby and Hebron commend your initiative.”

- Geoffrey Marshall, Convenor, Derby & Derbyshire Friends of Hebron  
[www.multifaithcentre.org/news/2020/derby-derbyshire-friends-of-hebron](http://www.multifaithcentre.org/news/2020/derby-derbyshire-friends-of-hebron)

“Town or city twinning is a positive concept which both communities can benefit from. It is essentially a statement of friendship, sometimes between two towns which have similarities but often between an established and prosperous city with a much poorer place suffering many difficulties.

Although in Brent we do not yet have a municipal link, our Brent Friends of Palestine organisation has been informally linked with the Palestine Trauma Centre in Gaza. We have found the work of the Trauma Centre to be imaginative and inspiring. They provide therapy and support for children and families adversely affected by the bombings of Gaza and the consequences of the blockade. We especially support the [‘Days of Joy’](#) project which has reached many thousands of young people in communities, schools and refugee camps, literally bringing an experience of joy.

Our main contribution has been to raise funds for their work, which we have done by many of our members and supporters making a monthly contribution but also through street collections and fundraising events. For the largest of these, the therapy team at Palestine Trauma Centre sent a video message of support.

We have also enjoyed direct links with the team and families in Gaza, facilitated by the office of the Palestine Trauma Centre (UK). The Director of the Centre, Dr Mohamed Altawil was born in Gaza but managed to escape and has now acquired a PhD in Clinical Psychology and is able to direct the work of the centre with qualified staff in Gaza.

Our link with Gaza has been very significant both to us and to families and especially young people in Gaza. If this proposal is adopted, you will be part of a Scottish initiative of cities twinning with key places in Palestine. We wish you well!”

- Andrew Papworth, Secretary, Brent Friends of Palestine  
[www.facebook.com/BrentFriendsofPalestine](https://www.facebook.com/BrentFriendsofPalestine)

“I have much pleasure in conveying to you, in behalf of Interfaith for Palestine (IFP), the following declaration of sympathy with the Edinburgh-Palestine Twinning Link, which has been submitted to, and approved by, the IFP cabinet.

IFP view with favour the establishment with Palestine of a national link with Edinburgh, and will use our best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being understood that nothing must be done which may prejudice the civil & religious rights of the existing



Palestinians and their refugee descendants in any other country, from the 2nd November 1917 onwards.

Military occupation, whether in Palestine or Ukraine, must be opposed. I would be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of Edinburgh Council.”

- Dr Joseph O'Neill, Founder, Interfaith for Palestine UK

“Northampton Al-Bireh (Palestine) Friendship Association (NABPFA), which has a supporter base of 250 in Northampton and around the UK, connects with Palestinian people in the Occupied West Bank with the purpose of raising awareness of the plight of Palestinian people while extending friendship.

NABPFA is a partner in the Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network. We support the proposed twinning of Edinburgh with Gaza and hope that Edinburgh Council supports this.”

- Kate Scott, Secretary, Northampton Al-Bireh (Palestine) Friendship Association (NABPFA), [www.nabpfa.co.uk](http://www.nabpfa.co.uk)

“Over the years, MWAE has hosted many cultural events celebrating the culture and traditions of Palestine and its people, with the aim of educating our Edinburgh communities about the diversity of the Muslim world and the place Palestine holds in our hearts. These have been well attended by Edinburgh people from all walks of life including councillors.

Edinburgh has always been welcoming and supportive to Palestinians studying and working here. MWAE have befriended students from Gaza who take pride in going back to their city in Palestine with a degree from Edinburgh university. Others have settled here and made our city their second home. Twinning our city with Gaza city will enrich and officially recognise this bond we have already forged.”

- Zareen Taj, Huda Abdalgader, Tasneem Ali, MWAE Trustees, Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh, [www.mwae.org.uk](http://www.mwae.org.uk)

“I am writing on behalf of Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC) to let you know that SACC strongly supports the proposal to twin Edinburgh with Gaza City set out in a council petition by Pete Gregson.

Twinning would mitigate the international isolation forced on the people of Gaza by the Government of Israel, would potentially make available to the people of Gaza the collective expertise of the people of our city on matters ranging from education and health to sport and culture, would help develop a climate for peace and would at the same time enrich the cultural and artistic resources available to the people of Edinburgh.

The long isolation suffered by the people of Gaza is at risk of being exacerbated by an erroneous perception that the proscription of Hamas by the UK Government last year implies that any collaborative relationship with people in Gaza is tantamount to support for



terrorism, or at the very least that it occupies a legal grey zone. The ban on Hamas is controversial, as evidenced by the fact that the UK Government has had the legal means to ban for Hamas for 20 years but until last year chose not to do so. But whatever view is taken of the ban, it is clear that its intention cannot have been to prevent the kind of civil society activities that would be associated with a twinning arrangement, and that this is not in fact its legal effect.

I hope that the Council will decide to adopt the proposal to twin Edinburgh with Gaza.”

- Richard Haley, Chair, Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC) [www.sacc.org.uk](http://www.sacc.org.uk)

-ENDS-

For more info or pictures, call Pete Gregson on 0758 472 2191



The Mayor of Gaza, Dr Yahya Sarraj