



## **Solidarity Complex**

### **Program Guide For Facilitators**

How do we constructively express our positions when speaking out about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? In this program, the short documentary film Solidarity Complex serves as a starting place for discussing this question.

The program concludes with brainstorming concrete steps that student organizations can take together to foster respectful, constructive advocacy and activism on Middle East issues.

#### **Suggested Audience**

5-25 participants who are involved in Israel and/or Palestine issues on campus.

#### **Suggested Format**

The program should be led by a facilitator or ideally co-facilitators representing more than one group. Participants can sit around tables small enough for conversation, or sit in chairs in a circle that can be grouped into small clusters.

#### **Time**

1.5 hour program.

#### **Materials**

- Laptop/internet/screen to show video
- Copies of participant's handout
- Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
- Post-it notes and pens

## **Introduction (20 Minutes)**

### **Who's in the Room**

Facilitators welcome everyone and start off the introductions. Everyone goes around the room and introduces themselves, how they heard about the program and what group they are part of (if any), and a fun fact about themselves (optional – or use your favorite icebreaker). Facilitators thank everyone for being here and emphasize how much they appreciate the groups that are coming together for this discussion.

### **Why We're Here**

Facilitator explains: The group is gathered to discuss an important question for advocates and activists who care about what happens in the Middle East. This is a question about how we express our positions. Are we working constructively towards a peaceful and secure future, or are we sometimes more driven by the desire to be right and to prove the other side wrong? Is it more important to hold the moral high ground or to bring about constructive change? Over the next hour and a half or so, we'll have a conversation about this question, and everyone will have a chance to express their thoughts and listen to other people's thoughts. First, we'll watch the film *Solidarity Complex*. Next we'll discuss the central questions the film raises. Finally, we'll talk about what we can take away from this conversation and put into action on our campus.

Facilitator frames the conversation a bit more: Our goal here today is to talk about how we communicate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and whether it is geared toward positive change. Although there are certainly very important conversations to be had about the way specific incidents have played out—in the case of the film we will watch, the focus is the recent Gaza conflict—that's not the conversation we are aiming for today. We will be primarily at the "talking about talking" level.

### **Group Agreements**

Facilitator emphasizes that this will be a space for honest and respectful discussion. There may be real disagreement and strong feelings in the group, and that's okay as long as they are expressed in a respectful way. To help the conversation be as honest and respectful as possible, there are some suggested group agreements on the participant's handout. Facilitator invites participants to go around the room and read the suggested group agreements out loud (at your discretion). Then facilitator asks if these agreements work for everyone, or if they have anything they would like to add.

#### **Suggested Group Agreements**

- Speak honestly from your personal opinions and experiences
- Listen fully and "hang in there" when you hear something challenging
- Share airtime and don't interrupt others
- Avoid personal attacks – focus on critiquing ideas
- Try not to make assumptions about other peoples' beliefs or motives – instead, talk with them and test your assumption
- If someone speaks in a small group or one-on-one, assume the comment is confidential unless they give you permission to share it
- Make the most of this chance to learn from each other

### **Personal Connections**

At tables or in small groups of 3-5, participants each get a turn to answer the following question. This is not a time to debate, but to listen fully to each person's response. Each person should have about 2 minutes to speak.

*Say a few words about your personal connection to the region. Why do you care about the Middle East and what happens there, and why do you choose to devote energy to these issues? What from your personal experience has led you in this direction?*

After everyone has gotten a chance to speak, come back together in the large group. Facilitator asks for highlights from the groups, reminding them to check with each other before retelling a personal experience or opinion of another group member.

### **Part I: Film Screening (15 Minutes)**

Introduce the film: *Solidarity Complex* is a new short documentary film by James Sevitt and Vika Evdokimenko, and an educational resource produced by the New Routes Trust, which takes a look at the rallies that occurred in London, UK during the war in Gaza and southern Israel.

Show the film (14:04 min): <http://www.vimeo.com/7542969>

### **Part II: Small Group Discussion (20 Minutes)**

Facilitators ask participants to form groups of 3-5 with people they don't know well, particularly members of other student organizations.

Discuss questions in small groups:

*What are your initial reactions to watching the film? What do you think about the questions it poses?*

*What specific terms and messaging depicted in the film "pushed your buttons"? What do you think is particularly useful/effective language, and what do you think is destructive? If you could change specific messaging within these protests, what would you change and why?*

*Does the film resonate with any of your experiences during the war in Gaza and southern Israel? If you attended rallies/protests/vigils, what was your impression of them -- were they more focused on owning the moral high ground or bringing an end to the conflict? What specifically made these actions constructive or unconstructive, in your opinion?*

*If you could plan a more constructive public action during a similar time of crisis, what would it look like?*

Note to facilitators: People may have diverse reactions to the content of the film, as it may bring up strong emotions and opinions about the Gaza conflict. The small group discussion is a good time for people to debrief these reactions if they need to. Later, during the large group discussion, the conversation should stay focused on the discourse and activism around the conflict. It's your job to make sure the group does not get bogged down in discussions of who is right and who is wrong, but stays focused on the question of how to constructively bring about change.

### **Part III: Large Group Discussion (30 Minutes)**

Come back together in the large group. Facilitator recaps the questions posed at the conclusion of the film:

*So where does this leave us when the rallies end and the crowds disperse?*

*How effective are such rallies in building the political pressure for the peace that the majority so clearly desire?*

*In taking action, are people actually more concerned with being right and owning the moral high ground than being successful?*

Facilitator invites discussion on these questions, drawing on highlights from the small group discussions—in particular, reporting back on the question about which specific messages are constructive or unconstructive. If necessary, facilitator gently reminds the group that this is not a forum to discuss the causes and effects of the Gaza conflict itself, but rather to discuss the discourse around the conflict in general.

After some discussion, then the group addresses the questions:

*[From the film] What new forms of solidarity can we create so as to maximize the impact of public action and focus our energies on pursuing justice and security for all?*

*On our campus specifically, what messaging do you feel is missing, drowned out, or needs to be given more prominence? Rather than playing the blame game, what are concrete steps we can take together to move our campus toward more constructive discourse around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?*

Facilitator records the ideas on flip chart/whiteboard, and encourages participants to suggest concrete ways the student groups represented can work together in the future.

Another option – Cake walk: Each student gets 2 post-it notes to write down ideas for concrete steps they could take on campus. Everyone posts the notes around the room and walk around. Then facilitator asks, “Did you see any ideas you think we could use on our campus?”

#### **Some Possible Next Steps**

- Writing a joint op-ed to the school newspaper about the importance of respectful, constructive advocacy and activism on Middle East issues. I.e. issuing a call to stop playing the blame game and focus instead on working towards a more peaceful and secure future.
- Planning another joint event, or co-sponsoring each other's events when appropriate.
- Coming up with guidelines for respectful debate and activism on Middle East issues on campus—a joint effort between all the relevant groups.

### **Closing (5 Minutes)**

Facilitators thank everyone for coming and joining in the lively discussion. Specific people are assigned to take the lead on next steps. Be sure the organizers have everyone's contact information.

After the event, follow up and thank participants and co-organizers. Continue the momentum on next steps!