Annual Town Report FY 2022 (July 2021-June 2022)

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Tina Burgos (Chair) Finn McKeon (NHS)

Lt. Belinda Carroll (liaison – NPD) Jennifer Howard Schroeder

Cynthia Ganung Marlene Schultz
Kerry Hurwitch Bud Schram
Katie King (liaison-SB) Julie Venables
Amelia Klein Emme Ward (NHS)

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CHARGE Human Rights Committee Approved August 12, 2008

Created in 1995 by the Select Board, the mission of the Human Rights Committee is to address matters pertaining to human and civil rights and problems related to thereto that may arise in the Town.

The charge of the Committee is to:

- 1. Advocate appreciation and respect for human and civil rights in our Town (EDUCATION);
- 2. Organize and/or recommend community events to constructively promote respect for human and civil rights in our Town (COMMUNITY OUTREACH);

3. Provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices in response to issues that challenge the human and/or civil rights of any individual or group in our Town (COMMUNITY RESPONSE)

NHRC LOGO



The NHRC logo design, which is universally recognized, combines the shape of a hand with that of a bird (dove). It was created by an international committee for the promotion and protection of human rights.

MEMBERSHIP

Official members of the Needham Human Rights Committee are Needham residents who volunteer to serve on the Committee. They are appointed by the Select Board.

The Committee shall consist of 12 members. When practicable, the Committee should include representatives or designees of the Needham Police Department and the Needham Public School Department (ex officio and non-voting), the Needham Commission on Disabilities, and the Needham Housing Authority. Membership should also include a representative of the local clergy, a senior citizen, a tenant of the Needham Housing Authority, a realtor, and a Needham High School student.

MEETINGS

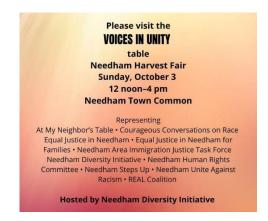
Human Rights Committee meetings are usually held the *third Thursday* of each month at Needham Town Hall, Highland Room, 7:30-9:00 pm. During the pandemic, virtual meetings have been conducted via Zoom. The Zoom meetings were recorded and are available for viewing on the YouTube channel. Meetings are open to the public and all meeting dates and agendas are posted on the Town website 48 hours prior to the meeting. On occasion, guest speakers are invited by the Committee to share their expertise in the area of human rights. Guest speakers play an important role as resources for planning future NHRC events. The Committee welcomes all Needham residents who are interested in human rights to attend a meeting and to learn about the work of the Committee. (Contact: www.needhamma.gov/humanrights)

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Organizing and sponsoring community events and educational forums related to human rights play a major role in the work of the NHRC. Following are highlights for the Fiscal Year 2022:

Needham Harvest Fair October 3, 2021 Town Common





The annual Needham Harvest Fair is organized by the Charles River Regional Chamber (formally the Newton-Needham Regional Chamber) in collaboration with the Town of Needham. An exhibit at the Fair, developed and hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative, highlighted the mission and initiatives of social justice/action groups in Needham. The title of the exhibit was *Voices in Unity*. The NHRC was a co-sponsor of the exhibit and joined other participating groups to inform the community about its work and its role as an official Town committee. The Fair provided a welcoming community setting in which to connect with Needham residents. (*Voices in Unity* video, produced by Equal Justice Needham, available at: https://youtu.be/GuH34pT7iJg - Click: *Browse YouTube*)

Diversity Summit November 14, 2021 ZOOM Conference

The Needham Diversity Summit is an annual event that brings together community leaders, friends, neighbors, and students to explore, foster, strengthen, and celebrate Needham's diversity – of socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, ethnic identity, age and ability. This year's theme was *Voices in Unity*.



The keynote speaker was Dr. Gary Bailey, a Professor of Practice at Simmons School of Social Work and at the Simmons School of Nursing. In addition Needham leaders, residents & students shared their diverse journeys, followed by interactive breakout sessions on topical issues and what's next in activism. The program concluded with inspirational multimedia video & musical presentations. The Needham Human Rights Committee has been a co-sponsor of this important event for many years. NHRC members served on the Diversity Summit Planning Committee. Participants in the Diversity Summit program included a Select Board member,

Needham Police Chief, representative of NUARI, State Senator, State Representative, and chair of the Needham Human Rights Committee. (Zoom recording of the 2021 Diversity Summit can be found at https://www.needhamdiversity.org/)

Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration Jan. 17, 2022 **ZOOM** Conference

Much of the power of our Freedom Movement in the United States has come from this music. It has strengthened us with its sweet rhythms when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich

Needham's Celebration and Observance of

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

www.NeedhamDiversity.org

Monday, January 17, 2022 10:30 AM- 11:30 AM

Zoom Link will open at 10:15 AM

Free Registration: Here

For more information visit:



- Diversity Initiative
 Interfaith Clergy Association
- Human Rights Committee
 Public Schools and its METCO Program

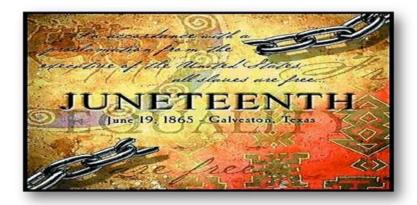
This annual family friendly event celebrates the legacy, life and achievement of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The event is hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative. NHRC is an on-going sponsor of the community celebration. Other sponsors were the Needham Interfaith Clergy Association, and the Needham Public Schools and their METCO program. Two members of NHRC serve on the board of NDI. This year's program presented a musical celebration of Dr. King's legacy featuring local artists and groups. In Dr. King's words: "Much of the power of our Freedom Movement in the United States has come from this music. It has strengthened us with its sweet rhythms when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich harmonies when spirits were down." Jonathan King, a diversity, equity and inclusion practitioner, was the keynote speaker. Featured guest Brother Dennis Slaughter, Director of Music at the Parkway Church in Milton, directed the Boston Community Gospel Choir. (Zoom recording of 2022 MLK Day celebration available at https://www.needhamdiversity.org/)

> At My Neighbor's Table Series Jan. 23, 2022 **Zoom Conference**



The At My Neighbor's Table events adhere to the principal that all people - regardless of social, economic or health status; gender, religion, national, racial or ethnic identity; sexual orientation, political affiliation, age, or physical ability - are deserving of respect and equity within communities. Through the process of dialogue, AMNT program developers create conversations that bring people together in collective learning and inquiry. The conversations foster respectful sharing, listening, and discussion about equity in our communities. Two members of the NHRC serve on the AMNT planning committee, one member chairing the Committee. The title (and focus) of the 2022 event was *Leaning into Challenging Conversations: How to Listen, What to Say, How to Say It.* Liora Norwich, Executive Director at Network for Social Justice, was the guest presenter and facilitator. Ms. Norwich worked in Israel and Palestine to advance social justice and civic engagement through integrated community development initiatives with local partners and international organizations. The interactive workshop focused on meaningful conversation and active listening, and provided a framework for engaging in dialogue across difference.

Juneteenth June 1-19, 2022



Juneteenth is a remembrance of the date in $1865 - 2\frac{1}{2}$ years after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation — when a Union general arrived in Galveston and informed Texas

residents that enslaved Black people had been freed, prompting the release of tens of thousands still in bondage. 2022 was the second year the Needham Human Rights Committee planned and executed a formal event for Juneteenth to recognize and celebrate this pivotal holiday of independence. This year the Needham Diversity Initiative collaborated with the Committee to plan events. Due to COVID-19, events were celebrated virtually. Beginning on June 1, NHRC launched a series of daily Facebook posts featuring activities, events, and resources leading up to June 19. In commemoration, a statement was shared with the Needham community:

Commemorating Juneteenth is an important acknowledgment of the sacrifice of formerly enslaved Black people in this country, and a reminder of the ongoing racial justice work needed for the promise of freedom to be a reality for all of us. It's a day we commemorate the end of slavery and we honor the Black community's role fighting for their rights and making us a better nation.

Across the country, hundreds of people, of all races, nationalities and religions join hands to acknowledge the painful history and lasting systemic impact of slavery and racial injustice in the United States. Juneteenth is an opportunity to recommit ourselves to the goal of creating a more equal and just society.

In 2020, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker proclaimed June 19th to be an official state holiday. The Needham Human Rights Committee recognizes this important holiday of independence in its continued resolve to bring about equality for all citizens of our community. We ask that you join us in observance of this pivotal moment in American history. (*Previously recorded by Select Board member Marcus Nelson and posted on the NHRC Facebook page*)

Race Amity Day June 12, 2022 Amity Path



Amity means friendship. Race Amity Day is a celebration of the tradition of cross-cultural and cross-racial partnership and collaboration. It occurs on the second Sunday in June. The

Commonwealth of Massachusetts declared Race Amity Day an official holiday in 2015, thanks to the efforts of Rep. Denise Garlick of Needham. Cities and towns of Massachusetts are encouraged to recognize Race Amity Day in some meaningful way. The purpose of Race Amity Day is to:

- Develop forums and initiatives to advance cross-racial and cross-cultural amity that impact the public discourse on race
- Overcome racial prejudice through association, amity, and collaboration.
- Encourage and advocate for cross racial/cross cultural friendships

These objectives were met in the 2022 Needham Race Amity Day celebration through activities designed to create a community gathering: sharing food, organizing play activities for young children, and entertainment. The NHRC was a co-sponsor of the event which was hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative. The multi-racial audience was inspired by musical guests West of Willow Band and the Interfaith Coalition Singers. Attendees strolled together on the Needham Amity Path, while children & families engaged in rock painting.

















COMMUNITY OUTREACH

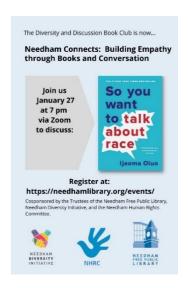
In pursuing its mission, the NHRC seeks opportunities to collaborate - and develop on-going relationships - with groups in the Needham Community. Following are examples of ways the NHRC has made efforts to collaborate with official and non-official Town Committees and organizations.

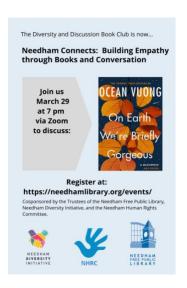
NEEDHAM UNITES AGAINST RACISM INITIATIVE During the summer of 2020, the Needham Select Board launched the Needham Unites Against Racism Initiative (NUARI) in an effort to establish a framework for the community to discuss difficult issues related to racism and create strategies for dismantling systemic racism and making Needham a more inclusive and welcoming community for all. The Select Board appointed two members of the Needham Human Rights Committee to sit on this working group: Marcus Nelson (former NHRC member) and Jennifer Howard Schroeder, along with invited members of the community.

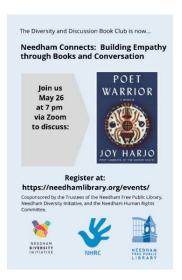
NUARI's efforts led to the planning of a three-part community conversation on race and policing, called *Connections: Cops and Community*, all three moderated by Needham resident Chad Williams, Professor of History and African and African American Studies at Brandeis University.

- 1. The first session in March of 2022 introduced by NHRC members Tina Burgos and Marcus Nelson gathered three panelists: Needham Police Officer Anthony Frongillo, covering the history of policing in the United States; Gloria Greis, Executive Director, Needham History Center & Museum, speaking about the history of policing in Needham; and Police Chief John Schlittler, discussing current policing in Needham.
- 2. The second session, in May 2022 "Exploring the Role and Impact of School Resource Officers," focused on youth and police interactions, with a particular focus on School Resource Officers. Participants heard from UMass Boston McCormack Graduate School Professor Mark Warren about the history of School Resource Officers, how their roles have evolved over time, and current data on outcomes and racial impacts. Needham School Resource Officer RJ Poirier shared an overview of his role in the Needham Public Schools, and the Needham Police Department's philosophy, partnerships, and approach to working with youth. The event concluded following small break-out groups for discussion and reflection.
- 3. The third and final session in June 2022 began with a compelling appearance by M. Quinten Williams, founder and CEO of Dedication to Community, a national non-profit that helps improve understanding and build relationships in communities through healing reconciliation, and unity. Several officers from the Needham Police Department participated in small group discussions with Needham residents to answer a question posed by Mr. Williams: What is the most pressing issue related to policing and community? Mr. Williams suggested a critical path forward for Needham: listen, learn, understand, acknowledge, act, trust, heal, and reconcile.

NEEDHAM FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY The Needham Human Rights Committee continued its partnership with the Needham Diversity Initiative and the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library in offering the community opportunities to build connections through books. Previously called The Diversity and Discussion Book Club, the discussion series was renamed *Needham Connects: Building Empathy through Books and Conversations.* NHRC members participated in a book selection process, promoted the series through social media, and attended book discussions. *Needham Connects* hosted three zoom discussions of selected books. (Zoom recordings of book discussions available on YouTube)







MEDIA SOURCES The NHRC has developed close links with local media sources. Direct contact with editors and journalists in the past has helped the Committee promote its events and generate interest in human rights. The <u>Hometown Weekly</u> has consistently responded to press releases and published lead articles about committee-sponsored events in a timely fashion. Additionally, the NHRC launched its own Facebook page to publicize events and promote understanding of human rights issues in the community. The <u>News from the Town of Needham</u> has been an important source for publicizing the work of the Committee to Town residents.

NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS The NHRC is committed to developing on-going relationships with school personnel and students. Their input is critical in the planning of educational forums which address the challenges faced by youth in our community. The NHRC provides opportunities for NHS students to take on leadership roles as members of the Committee, and to take initiative in providing student participation and input in the planning of events. The Needham High School representatives who serve on the Committee provide an important link to faculty and student groups.

REAL Coalition A member of NHRC serves on the School District-wide team: Race, Equity, Access & Leadership (REAL), whose purpose is to lead the work and conversations around equity in the Needham Public Schools and classrooms. The NHRC is a partner of the Coalition.

Indigenous Peoples Day A committee was formed in 2020 when two Needham Public High School students requested guidance from NHRC to create a petition to change the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day in the official NPS calendar. NHRC members serve on the planning committee along with Needham Diversity Initiative members. Since the School Committee voted to make the change in the NPS calendar, the IPD committee has contemplated its role with a focus on Indigenous Peoples Day celebration. The IPD committee is in the process of developing a clear vision of what its future goals will be, and is considering teaming up with other

groups in town to execute these goals. The planning committee is seeking students who are interested in Indigenous Peoples Day movements to serve on the IPD committee.

Voices in Unity Organized by Joanne Allen-Willoughby, director of the Needham METCO program, VIU brings together anti-racist and anti-bias groups in Needham to find ways they can support one another, and to develop a common language and understanding. The group meets monthly. Meetings are facilitated by Dr. Willoughby along with Dr. Gary Bailey, director at Simmons College. NHRC members participate in the meetings and share its mission to collectively work with the Town of Needham to combat systemic racism.

NEEDHAM DIVERSITY INITIATIVE, Inc. The Needham Diversity Initiative (NDI) is a grass-roots, community organization of individuals who live, work, study - or whose children study - in Needham. Many are educators and have been involved with diversity training in the past (e.g., via their profession or membership in Needham's Human Rights Committee, Needham Clergy Association, League of Women Voters, or Immigration Justice Task Force). The NDI organizes on-going events, workshops, and community forums which provide opportunities for residents of Needham to learn about the diverse populations within their community, to examine diversity issues, and to build diverse coalitions. Two members of the NHRC serve on the Board of the Needham Diversity Initiative. The NHRC has been an annual co-sponsor of the Needham Diversity Summit and the Martin Luther King Day Celebration. The NHRC has co-sponsored many of the events organized by the NDI during the past year.

NEEDHAM CLERGY ASSOCIATION One member of the NHRC is an active member of the Needham Clergy Association. Both groups have shared information about their work with members of their respective organizations, and have supported and attended public events organized by each group. This past year, the NHRC was a co-sponsor of a community inter-faith virtual conference as part of the At My Neighbor's Table Series.

NEEDHAM IMMIGRATION JUSTICE TASK FORCE Two members of the NHRC serve on the Immigration Justice Task Force and have been important links to the group. The NHRC has supported the activities of the IJTF and has attended and co-sponsored events they have organized. The work of the IJTF is relevant to the work of the Committee: both groups are advocates for human rights. The IJTF has been an important source of information about current issues and actions taken in relation to immigration policies, many that involve residents and employees in the Town of Needham.

BETH ISRAEL DEACONESS NEEDHAM HOSPITAL Non-profit hospitals are required to conduct an assessment every 3 years and develop an implementation strategy that will address the needs of the communities they serve. A representative from Beth Israel Deaconess Needham met with the NHRC and invited the Committee to participate in a *Community Health Needs Assessment* to identify and prioritize health-related and social needs of those served by the hospital. Two members of NHRC participated in a virtual Community Listening Session organized by BIDN. Attendees reviewed gaps and barriers as well as resources and existing assets related to: Mental Health, Community Connections and Information Sharing, and Social Detriments of Health. Emphasis was on diverse populations and those experiencing inequities.

The session highlighted social factors that impacted access to health care, such as education, geography, social-economic status, and race. NHRC provided BIDN staff with a list of key advocacy groups and organizations in Needham that could provide assistance and/or support for diverse populations and newcomers to Needham needing support. (2022 BIDN *Community Health Needs Assessment* can be found at: Community Benefits (bidneedham.org)

HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE GROUPS

The NHRC has kept informed about human rights issues by connecting to regional organizations and groups who serve as resources to the Committee. These resources enhance the work of the Committee in planning educational forums, and in responding to issues that challenge the human rights of any individual or group in the Needham Community.

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELATIONS COMMISSIONS (MAHRC) The Massachusetts Association of Human Rights and Relations Commissions is an organization of municipal and local agencies responsible for promoting human and civil rights and harmonious relationships among diverse groups at a local level. The mission of MAHRC is to provide local and statewide leadership in the areas of human rights and intergroup relationships. MAHRC accomplishes this charge by promoting networking initiatives, developing educational strategies and model programs; and serving as a resource for new and existing human rights and relations commissions. Members of NHRC have committed to attending monthly meetings and reporting information relevant to the mission of the Committee.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

In meeting its charge to provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices, the Needham Human Rights Committee has supported community efforts that promote inclusivity, and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias.

Town Vigils



Vigil in Support of Ukrainian People – Mar. 2, 2022 More than 100 people attended a prayer vigil for Ukraine organized by the Interfaith Clergy Association. The NHRC was a sponsor of the vigil. During the vigil, chimes were struck 25 times, each representing a region of Ukraine and Crimea. Members of the Ukrainian American community in Needham shared their personal stories and asked for donations of medical supplies and other essentials to be shipped to the Ukraine. https://hometownweekly.net/needham/ukraine-vigil-held-outside-town-hall/

Celebration and Commemoration



Trans Gender Day of Remembrance – Nov. 13, 2021 On Transgender Day of Remembrance, the world pauses to remember the lives of the many transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming persons killed in acts of targeted, transphobic violence. Transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming persons have always been a part of our families, cultures, and nations. History teaches us that gender diversity is not new and that the strongest societies celebrate the intellectual and cultural contributions and creativity that come from diversity. As we mourn the transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming persons who have paid the ultimate price for others' hatred, we honor their memory by continuing the fight for a world free of transphobic and gender-based violence and discrimination. [US Dept. of State] The NHRC is an on-going sponsor of the Trans Gender Day of Remembrance, and strives to raise awareness of issues the transgender community faces through education and advocacy activities.

PRIDE Month



June is PRIDE MONTH, a time when events are held all across the country to celebrate and support the LGBTQ community. The monthlong celebration is a call for greater unity, visibility and equality for the LGBTQ community. It is observed in June to honor the anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, a touchstone event in LGBTQ history that laid the foundation for PRIDE. This year a NHRC Youth Subcommittee of High School students in Needham spearheaded an initiative to create a PRIDE display. A "Wishing Tree" was put up in Town Hall displaying messages, solicited from Needham residents, of solidarity and educational and historical information about the LGBTQ movement.





Needham Resilience Network

As part of its mission to protect the human rights of all Needham residents, the Needham Human Rights Committee has provided advice and assistance to the town and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias. On May 17, 2018, NHRC organized an open community forum to discuss types of efforts or programs that would enhance Needham's ability to respond to incidents of hate and bias that happen in the Town. Since that time, the Town has moved forward in developing a formal, town-wide process referred to as the Needham Resilience Network (NRN). The NRN was launched in March 2022. Following are excerpts published in Hometown Weekly that provide an overview of NRN:

On the first Thursday of every month, leaders from a diverse set of stakeholder and identity groups in Needham come together to get to know each other as individuals, share and listen to each other's perspectives, build trust, and acquire skills in communicating around differences.

The group consists of representatives from Needham's faith, identity, school, civic, service, healthcare, and business communities. Town leaders, including a representative from the Select Board, the Town Manager, the Head of Public Health, the Superintendent of Schools, and the Needham Police Chief, participate with ex-officio status. As the NRN explores local issues, its leaders will act as liaisons to their communities, collecting their communities' stories and perspectives for discussion within the NRN and bringing information from the NRN back to their communities. A member of the NHRC is a participant in the group meetings. To learn more about the work of the NRN, visit www.nrnma.org or contact info@nrnma.org.

Development of a NHRC Complaint Process

The NHRC Committee began work in 2021 on creating a discrimination complaint process for the Town. A sub-committee was appointed to begin drafting a process which would be presented to the Select Board, clarifying NHRC responsibilities in the process. The sub-committee developed a narrative explaining who the protected classes are, provided some examples of possible scenarios, and included a restorative justice component. The goal of this process is to provide a place where people, who believe that their human or civil rights have been violated, can lodge complaints. The process will service all who live, work, and travel through the Town of Needham.

Under this discrimination complaint process the NHRC will:

- Be a place for people to be heard
- Facilitate discussions between an aggrieved person and the other party
- Increase understanding between people of different perspectives
- Work with community members involved in an incident to understand the intent versus the impact of their actions
- Recommend changes to the Select Board for Town policies or programs

The sub-committee has held on-going meetings with the Select Board chairs and Town Counsel to formulate a workable solution in order to comply with the Open Meeting Law. The Committee agreed that they would need to be trained in how to handle these kinds of complaints, and what types of language would be appropriate. The sub-committee is pursuing professional resources to provide training sessions in how to recognize human rights violations, active listening, and effective facilitation.





War in Ukraine March 25, 2022

The Needham Human Rights Committee strongly condemns the war in Ukraine and hopes for a swift end to the senseless violence that is being perpetrated against Ukrainian citizens. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of this upheaval is that anti-Russian bias is appearing in our community and region. Biases – whether unintentional or not – are based on stereotypes that lead to rash decisions or discriminatory practices against people of a particular ethnicity, gender, race or social group. Social media and news reports are encouraging their neighbors to take negative action toward anyone who is "Russian" or affiliated with "Russians", such as boycotting businesses that sell Russian products, initiating bans against Russian arts and culture, or targeting Russians living in local communities.

Our State officials have cautioned that biases or unsupported assumptions can be harmful, such as "shutting down some Russian immigrant family that's been here in Massachusetts for years and runs a business that may have some sort of Russian overtone." Anti-Russian bias in the media affects children, who according to studies develop biases at a surprisingly young age. A NHRC colleague who immigrated to Needham from Syria gave a striking example of how her children were approached by classmates who asked them "Do you belong to ISIS?"

As your Human Rights Committee, our work aims to build bridges of understanding as we advocate for the human rights of all in our town. During this troubling and uncertain time, we are guided by the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

Anti-Semitic Rhetoric June 16, 2022

Recently, many Jewish organizations in Massachusetts have been the focus of hate through an online published list which contains harmful anti-Semitic rhetoric. Specifically, the aim of the Mapping Project is to "dismantle" and "disrupt" the entities that are targeted on this list.

Given this, the Needham Human Rights Committee declares that we stand in solidarity and support of the Jewish community, as hate, in all forms, does not belong in our communities.