

Bethesda Friends Meeting Minute:

An urgent call to protect human life and bring a just peace to Palestine and Israel

Approved January 7, 2024

1. The ongoing violence in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel must stop.
2. As Quakers, we believe that there is that of God in every person. Every life is precious. All persons deserve to live in a peaceful and just world. War is not the answer; peace needs to be actively cultivated. We are outraged and heartsick about the deaths, destruction, and disregard for human life that we are witnessing in Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank. We condemn the recent and long-standing historical cycles of violence, particularly the widespread attacks on civilians. We deeply grieve for those in Palestine and Israel who are experiencing horrific suffering.
3. We call for an immediate lasting ceasefire and a total end to hostilities on the way to a genuine effort towards a peaceful and just solution. The way forward must recognize the trauma and needs of both Palestinians and Israelis and promote the peaceful and just sharing of the beloved land. This latest round of violence shows that the path to an enduring and just peace lies not in destruction and denial of the other but in acknowledging the aspirations of both.
4. We perceive that many parties to this conflict are using their energies and resources to fuel conflict rather than foster peace.
 - 4.1 We call on the United States government to support efforts to establish a permanent bilateral ceasefire, negotiate a durable peace, and contribute to humanitarian assistance and peace-building, particularly in Gaza. The United States needs to fully support the efforts of the United Nations to enforce international law, establish a ceasefire, and negotiate a peaceful solution.
 - 4.2 We call on the United States to act with integrity by consistently applying its policies for supplying armaments to allies, including monitoring appropriate use, and addressing any violation. We are particularly grieved when bombs that are provided by the United States are dropped indiscriminately on heavily populated areas. The death of civilians and near total destruction of Gaza, funded in large part by American tax dollars, weighs on our hearts and collective conscience.
 - 4.3 We call for the immediate release of all hostages held by Palestinian factions in Gaza and prisoners held by Israel under administrative detention without either charges or a trial.

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5. We are horrified by the humanitarian crisis taking shape in Gaza resulting from the extensive destruction of life, livelihood, property, and from the lack of access to the basic necessities of fuel, water, food, utilities, shelter, and medical care. We call for the care and protection of civilians displaced or deprived by the hostilities, including a facilitated and sufficient flow of humanitarian relief to sustain the civilian population. We call for Gazan civilians to receive such support without being removed from their land. We are deeply concerned that the conflict in Gaza has spread into the West Bank, worsening tensions, and jeopardizing the welfare, freedom, and possessions of civilians.

6. We call for respect for the humanity of all people. Dehumanizing words and actions fuel polarization and conflict. They are used to justify degradation and violence. The current eruption of violence in the Middle East is increasing Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Arab bias in the United States and around the world. The consequent bigotry and violence that follow are neither making people safer nor forging a path to peace; they are tearing at the fabric of our shared humanity.

7. Finally, we ask everyone, including those in power, to learn from and work with the peace-builders, who have labored long and hard on all sides in this dark time. May they lead us all in creating an enduring peace built on justice and reconciliation that provides safety, sovereignty, and a future free of war for Palestinian and Israeli children and all people of the region.