

# A Call for Peace & Justice in Israel-Palestine from Quakers in Montclair, NJ

*A minute from the Montclair Meeting of the Religious  
Society of Friends, March 10, 2024*



*Illustrations by friend Avital Shtapura*

**Quakers have a radical Peace Testimony for the world that we reaffirm in this time of war in Israel-Palestine.**

As members of the Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Montclair, New Jersey, we proclaim this Peace Testimony. We believe that there is that of God in every person. We believe that violence only perpetuates violence.

Therefore, we oppose the use of violence, and we work to realize peace, together with justice and compassion, to heal this world.

**Peace means ending war.**

We call on the U.S. government to support an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Israel-Palestine. We do not morally equate the degree of suffering of people on any side of this war. Yet we testify that all life is sacred, and civilian life is inviolable. And we bear witness that both the massacres perpetrated by Hamas on October 7, and the Israeli government's ongoing massacres and aerial bombardment of Gaza (with the force of multiple nuclear bombs), have explicitly targeted civilians.

The killing of even one person, the devastation of even one family — every single one — creates a universe of sorrow. Quakers believe that there is Divine Light in every person. Light is never expunged, even in the darkness of death.

## **Peace means ending U.S. funding for war.**

We call on the U.S. government to stop sending billions of our taxpayer dollars every year to fund the Israeli government's violent campaigns and military rule over Palestinian lives and land. Instead, the U.S. government should invest in peace by funding life-sustaining humanitarian aid and helping to rebuild Gaza, free of siege and starvation, so that Palestinians may thrive on this land.

We must end our complicity in oppression and violence that run counter to the values we aspire to as Americans. Indeed, it is because of this complicity that we have a special obligation as Americans to speak up for peace and justice in Israel-Palestine — just as we strive as Quakers to speak up in so many war-afflicted places around the world.

## **Peace means realizing justice.**

Historical context is not a justification for violence. Yet if we are serious about working for peace, we must understand that violence is often one symptom of a deeper ailment: the denial of justice to the oppressed. For decades, the Israeli government has displaced Palestinians from their lands and homes, denied them equal rights, and ruled over them with military courts and administrators. At the same time, the Israeli government has built Jewish-only settlements and a maze of checkpoints that restrict Palestinian life and movement in the Occupied Territories, while facilitating it for Israelis.

The Israeli government justifies its violent denial of justice to Palestinians in the name of security for Israelis. But this is not how justice and security work. It is only by respecting the rights of our neighbors that we can expect to realize true security for all. Meanwhile, Palestinian armed groups justify their violent actions against Israelis in the name of resistance. But such violence only undermines legitimate Palestinian calls for justice and heightens insecurity for all. Violence begets violence.

There is another way — the way of peace. Peace is the only practical way to address the unjust, unsafe, and racialized status quo in Israel-Palestine. Peace is not a self-interested negotiation. It is an active process rooted in mutual understanding, empathy, and compassion. It involves de-escalation, demilitarization, decolonization, restoration, reparation, reconciliation, and consecration of equal rights.

## **Peace means engaging in discourses of inclusivity.**

We know that neither the rhetoric of security nor resistance can justify violence. But there is another, more fundamental and problematic discourse at the core of violence in Israel-Palestine. It is the exclusive claim to the land for one ethno-religious or national group – whether Jewish or Arab, Israeli or Palestinian. Exclusive claims will not work on a shared land. Exclusive claims demonize and dehumanize the other. They often rise above mere nationalism to the level of hate speech. They ride the airwaves and fill political party charters, whether Hamas or Likud. They feed the fire of war.

We must lift up voices proclaiming the truth of the shared humanity of Israelis and Palestinians, the historical legacy of Jewish-Arab coexistence in the region, and the common Abrahamic religious heritage of many people of faith there. We must lift these voices up over the voices of antisemitism and islamophobia.

At the same time, we should not mistake legitimate calls for self-determination, equal rights, and the end of systems of oppression for hate speech. As such, we call on governments and speech platforms in the U.S. and around the world to protect free speech promoting these causes, not silence it online or on our city streets and college campuses.

## **Peace means ensuring the self-determination of all people.**

Five million Palestinians live under Israeli military rule as stateless people, with little to no say in their own governance, nor any country they can claim to belong to. Millions more stateless Palestinians live as refugees in neighboring countries, displaced by the violence of past wars. Like Israelis and all peoples around the world, Palestinians have the inalienable right to self-determination.

We call on the Israeli government and Palestinian leaders to engage one another with compassion and reach a just arrangement that both secures the Palestinian people's fundamental rights to political representation and national self-determination, and preserves these same rights for Israelis (who currently enjoy them). This just arrangement may mean two states for two peoples, possibly in a confederacy that would allow free movement through shared spaces. Or perhaps it would mean one democratic state of equal citizenship for all people in this land with guarantees of communal, religious, and other rights.

**Peace means building community to flourish in this life with security.**

If we work to love our enemy, we may find that we no longer have enemies — only neighbors. And we are called to love our neighbors too.



We know that there has been inter-communal violence in Israel-Palestine, including horrific acts of terrorism and systemic military violence. There are even deeper layers of historical trauma for Jews who live with the impact of the Holocaust in Europe, and Palestinians who continue to suffer the impacts of British colonialism. But communal violence is not the legacy of this land. Rather, the real legacy lies in the flourishing societies that Jews, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, and others in the region have built together for centuries as siblings in faith and humanity. This can and must be our future together.

Violence often results when we do not know what to do with our suffering. Yet no matter how high the concrete walls the Israeli government builds around Palestinian villages and cities, and no matter how many rockets Palestinian armed groups amass and fire — no one in this land will be safe until all have their rights secured. No one will be able to walk on the street, study in school, or go to work without fear until we build ties that bind communities together. We must recognize that to be a neighbor means both a responsibility and an expectation of care. A broad ethic of care and compassion is the antidote to the narrow communal definitions that have produced the inequality and insecurity of the present day.



**Peace means holding up others and standing up ourselves.**

We hold in the Light all Israelis, Palestinians, and others around the world affected by this war. Here in the U.S., we hold in the Light the Arab, Muslim, Palestinian, and Jewish American victims of hate crimes, including the three graduates of Ramallah Friends School who were shot in Vermont while speaking Arabic and wearing Palestinian scarves. We hold ourselves in the Light, recognizing

the connections many of us have to the region and the secondary trauma we experience in witnessing the violence of this war.

We also stand up for all those affected by this war with our action. We must work for peace. We must educate ourselves, organize, and support those on the ground working for peace. And we must strive to live our own lives individually and communally in peace. We do this because we know that there is inherent dignity in every human life, in Israel-Palestine and in all the world. We do this because we uphold the Peace Testimony, and peace means ending war. Peace means realizing justice. Peace means ending oppression. It means anti-racism. It means community.

Peace means life.