

Statement on Israel and Palestine by the Madison Friends Meeting (Quakers)

February 2, 2024

The Friends (Quakers) testimony of peace is based on the belief that there is that of God in everyone. Every life is of value, and every human deserves the right to live in peace and in dignity.

We mourn the continuing loss of life and relentless destruction that has taken place in Israel and Gaza since October 7th 2023. As citizens of the US we recognize that our country plays a major role in the conflict and must use its influence to end the violence and assist survivors.

- We appeal to our President and congressional representatives to use the US relationship with Israel to **call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza**, and to obtain Israel's cooperation with humanitarian organizations providing food, water, fuel and medical assistance and safe shelter to the survivors of its assault.
- We urge the US to **end shipments of weapons to Israel** that are being used to commit the killings in Gaza and the West Bank.
- We urge the US to **restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)** to distribute life-saving aid to Gaza residents and other Palestinians in the region. Millions should not be punished for the actions of a few UNWRA employees.

It is crucial that the US, along with the international community, address the root causes of violence in Palestine and Israel, which date back at least 100 years, but intensified in 1947 when the United Nations, with US support, divided the British mandate of Palestine into two states: Jewish and Arab.

After the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from territory captured by Israel and not allowed to return. Since then, continuing armed conflicts between Israel, its Arab neighbors and armed Palestinian groups have scattered 5.5 million Palestinians to refugee camps in Israel's neighboring states, the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian residents in the West Bank have endured Israel's brutal military occupation since 1967. Since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007, Israel has created apartheid conditions, imposing additional sanctions on the 2.3 million inhabitants of Gaza, including severe travel restrictions and a blockade of imports

of medical supplies, fuel and electronics and exports of crops and agricultural products.

Hamas' violent attack on Israeli citizens and taking of hostages on October 7, 2023 was brutal and inhumane. Israelis are still suffering fear and grief because of the killings, reported torture and sexual assault of over 1100 Israelis and foreign nationals, two thirds of them civilians, and the seizure of roughly 240 Israeli hostages, over one hundred and thirty of whom are still in captivity.

We are horrified by Israel's retaliatory massacre of over 27,000 Palestinians living in Gaza, two thirds of them women and children; the intensive bombing of Gaza's hospitals, schools and refugee camps; the shutoff of Gaza's electricity and water supply, the blockade of its fuel, food and medical supplies; the displacement of most of its residents; and the exposure of its survivors to environmental contamination due to bomb toxins. In the West Bank, attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian farmers and other civilians has resulted in the deaths of over 380 people since October 7.

Quaker organizations and individuals are not new to this issue, having worked to promote peace and justice in the Mideast for decades. Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) has a long history of working alongside Jewish, Arab and other communities to oppose violence and support peacebuilding efforts. American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has offices in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Gaza, and since 1948 has provided humanitarian assistance and programs to build bridges of understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. Ramallah Friends School has kept a hopeful vision of the future alive for young people.

A just, lasting peace must be based on the restoration of Palestinians' right to humanitarian living conditions, self-expression, self-determination and freedom of travel. A lasting peace must also protect the human rights and security of Israelis. Palestinians and Jews both have ancient roots to the land in this region and must come together to end the continuing conflicts and oppression.

We ask our local community to join us in calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, a halt to US shipments of weapons to Israel that are being used in the assault on residents in Gaza and the West Bank and restoration of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).