

Annapolis Friends (Quaker) Meeting minute - another call to preserve human life and bring a just peace to Israelis and Palestinians

Background

1. On October 7, 2023, Palestinian supporters of Hamas launched the most deadly terrorist attacks on Israeli communities since that state's founding in 1948, killing over 1,200, injuring more than 3,000 others, and taking approximately 240 hostages.

In addition to slaughter of unarmed civilians, Hamas attackers at many locations committed rapes and mutilation of female victims.

While Israelis had hoped they had built an impregnable 40 mile, \$1 billion security wall with barbed wire and electronic surveillance, over 1,000 trained Hamas fighters breached the wall at nearly 30 locations, through a network of tunnels and otherwise, launched approximately 3,000 rockets into Israel, and employed explosive-carrying drones.

This attack is the latest chapter in the 75 year history of violent conflict between Palestinians who see themselves as having been pushed from native lands in the 1948 Nakba ("Catastrophe") or Arab-Israeli war and parts of the Jewish community who fear that their Arab neighbors – particularly Hamas– still want to push them into the sea and to destroy their Jewish homeland. From a Palestinian viewpoint, they as long-term refugees are held in increasingly repressive, apartheid-like containment by the Israeli military. From an Israeli viewpoint (especially that of the ruling party and settlers), the October 7 attack culminated a long series of smaller but lethal attacks by Palestinian terrorists.

Despite past efforts towards peace negotiations, extremists on both sides have prevailed and prevented proposed "two-state solution" peace plans.

2. Israel's counter-attack via aerial bombardment, begun within hours, followed by armored ground assaults, and heavily-armed soldiers, has not been limited to military targets. While civilians were urged to evacuate northern cities in the Gaza strip, Israeli attacks followed the refugees and included attacks on Gaza's 17 hospitals. At this writing, only two hospitals remain capable of partial functioning. Israel's attack also has destroyed Gaza infrastructure, eliminating reliable water, electricity, sewage, and communication.

Gaza's Health Ministry reports over 29,000 Palestinian killed and more than 69,000 injured with over 70% of the casualties being women and children, as of this writing in late February 2024. According to U.N. officials, approximately 80% of Gaza's people have driven from their homes and approximately 25% are in danger of starvation. Today, as we write this minute, Israel has announced plans to begin its attack on Rafah, the final refuge for more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million refugees.

3. At the same time, tensions have increased in the West Bank territory occupied by Palestinians and Israeli settlers. Israeli sources report hundreds of small terrorist attacks there by Palestinians; Arab news sources report more than 300 Palestinian deaths in that territory since October 7 and the evacuation of more than a dozen Palestinian villages faced violence from settlers.

4. The Hamas-led fighters' attack on Israeli citizens was wrong, outrageous, and violated international law. Israel's counter-attack involved less face-to-face violence, its sheer violence and lethality also is wrong, horrific and violates international law with its use of heavy bombs on population centers and its knowing attack on civilians inflicting more than 20 times greater deaths and casualties than were perpetrated by the original Hamas-led attack.

Like all wars, this conflict cannot resolve the underlying problems that face Israelis and Palestinians.

5. The Biden administration has called on Israeli leaders for restraint in their ongoing attacks on Gaza to no avail. Recently, five U.S. Senators have proposed "Operation Gaza Relief"- a plan for a ceasefire and immediate humanitarian relief for Gaza civilians:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/02/16/israel-gaza-aid-senators-merkley-durbin-warren-vanhollen-welch/> This proposal promptly should be adopted as a good first step towards peace.

Minute:

As Quakers,, we believe 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 and never will be the answer to our conflicts. Peace must be actively cultivated.

We are outraged and heartsick about the deaths, destruction, and disregard for human life that we witness still unfolding in Israel, Gaza 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 both in Palestinian and Israeli lands who still experience this horrific suffering.

We join other Friends and people across the world in calling for a permanent ceasefire now, immediate release of the hostages held by Palestinian factions, of war prisoners held by Israelis, and the provision of urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza.

We call on the United States to act with integrity by consistently applying its weapons policies for allies, including monitoring appropriate use and addressing any violation. We are particularly grieved that bombs provided by the United States have been 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.

We also call for the United States government actively to support negotiators' efforts to establish a permanent bilateral ceasefire, negotiate a durable peace, and contribute to humanitarian assistance and peace-building, both in Gaza and other Palestinian territories. The United States should fully support the efforts of the United Nations to enforce international law, establish a ceasefire, and negotiate a long term peaceful solution. Particularly, we urge the Biden administration to support the recent proposal of 5 U.S. Senators to initiate "Operation Gaza Relief."

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 neither will make people safer nor forge a path to peace; they tear at the fabric of our shared humanity.

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. The core religions of Islam and Judaism share common roots and cultures that both fuel violence and possess the seeds of peace like two sides of one coin. As Friends, we support initiatives large and small to help both Israelis and Palestinians, plus the larger Jewish and Arab worlds that support them, to move away from mutual hatred and fear to find ways they can foster mutual understanding and common activities that could lead to a functional two state solution and peaceful coexistence.. 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.

As Annapolis Friends (Quaker) Meeting, we pray that this conflict will end quickly in a way that promotes equality, safety, and justice for all. Let us seek paths to work for an enduring peace with the tools available to us. We are called to act in faith and love, with persistence, patience, and courage, as partners and hands of the divine spirit as we pursue the sacred goal of peace, shalom, salaam.

Recommended actions:

Annapolis Friends Meeting recommends this minute be circulated to all members of the Maryland delegation to Congress and that members of Meeting ask for time to discuss them in person with the two U.S. Senators and the four U.S. representatives whose districts include Anne Arundel County.

It recommends sending it as a letter to the Annapolis Capital, the Baltimore Sun, and Washington Post following up with the editors to try to secure publication.

It recommends copying this minute to BYM, all BYM monthly meetings and FCNL with a call to generate similar minutes.

And it recommends setting up a local forum accessible to the public at a venue such as Anne Arundel Community College, Johns Hopkins, USNA or St.Johns to discuss, again, how peace better may be pursued and war better may be prevented with representatives from other faith communities and from the U.S. military, including the U.S. Naval Academy and Fort George G. Meade.