

Some Thoughts about Peacemaking, Palestine, and Israel
From Friends Meeting at Cambridge (Quakers)
November 28, 2014 – Version 25
DRAFT ONLY

For more than 300 years the Religious Society of Friends has felt led to "utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons for any end or under any pretense whatsoever".

We understand that many good people might consider our peace testimony as something that only unrealistic people will propose.

We ask those who make such a judgment: doesn't human experience demonstrate that political interaction that relies on coercion, revenge, and violence, contributes to the development of unhealthy environments in which resentment, fear, and hopelessness grow?

We also ask: doesn't human experience demonstrate that good things generally happen when we engage patiently and persistently with those with whom we disagree?

We urge all leaders everywhere to consider the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "an eye for an eye ultimately results in the whole world becoming blind." We implore all citizens of the world to consider such a possibility with passionate reasoned care. Is it actually realistic of us to allow our leaders to continue to rationalize and enact so much violence?

We believe that everyone properly opposes any policy that depends on the destruction of innocent civilians for its success. Therefore, while we cannot support any military operation, we especially call on leaders of the United States, Israel, Palestine, and all other nations, to cease support for any military action that is likely to result in civilian casualties. Hurting innocents seems wrong to us whether rationalized by terrorists, political parties, or by the leaders of nation states.

We therefore call upon Israeli leaders to cease trying to justify as "defensive operations," military response to Palestinian military actions that result in casualty rates that are astoundingly asymmetrical. We call on the leaders of the United States and of all other nations to stop seeking security through overwhelming force. We also ask our own nation and all other nations, to cease supplying arms to others, especially to those whose past actions include acceptance of civilian casualties. We therefore call on Palestinian leaders to cease launching missiles into Israel and to cease all other attacks on Israeli people.

We think it is natural for the people of Israel, having once been attacked by virtually all of its neighbors, to find it difficult to open to additional trust, especially when attacks are ongoing and annihilation of Israel continues to be claimed as a proper goal by so many.

We think that it is natural for the Palestinian people, who experience occupation, to find it difficult to open to additional trust, especially when such occupation includes the experience of ongoing civilian casualties, continuing encroachment of Israeli settlements on disputed land, and the imposition of severe and longstanding economic and social restrictions.

Nonetheless, we ask again: doesn't human history dependably demonstrate that allowing

hatred and revenge and anger to take hold and motivate our societal responses, consistently results in increasing misery? We also ask: isn't it true that when communities are prosperous and when coercion and threats cease, the security of all is generally enhanced?

We therefore call on Israel's leaders to end the blockade and embargo on goods coming into Palestine. We therefore call on Israel and the international community to immediately help Palestine become a community in which sufficient material support can be routinely earned. We therefore implore Israel to immediately cease all settlement construction outside of its 1967 borders.

For the same reasons, we call on Palestinian leaders to work hard to end all attacks and other activities that end up clearly strengthening Israeli conviction that Israel is threatened. We therefore ask Palestinian leadership to publicly define its offers of a 10 year truce as also being offers to recognize Israel for that period of time. In and of itself, we do not ask Israel to accept or reject any peace agreement that limits the degree or time period of recognition for Israel by Palestinians. However, if any future proposed peace agreement is acceptable otherwise, we encourage Israel to very seriously consider accepting such a "time limited recognition" since trust can grow during a time of peace and so may result in a permanent peace and full recognition later. In any case, we emphatically implore Israel to abandon its insistence that no peace talks can take place without prior unconditional recognition of Israel by Palestine.

Notwithstanding everything communicated above, our prime request is that all world leaders, including Israeli and Palestinian officials, commit to talk, without preconditions, for as long and as often as it takes to find peace.

We believe the creation of healthier world relationships and more peaceful political interaction at all societal levels is possible. We believe that such change and reconciliation become possible when people engage in respectful communication. It is our sense that such communication is characterized by an ongoing willingness to search for non-coercive and mutually beneficial resolution of differences, an openness to re-evaluate one's own opinions, and by maintenance of patient open-hearted attitudes.

We acknowledge that we all fall short in acting on the principles we suggest. Nonetheless, we reaffirm our judgment that human history reliably demonstrates that human beings experience consistent societal progress when they keep trying hard to follow such principles and when they just start/try again when they fall short.

We therefore urge all citizens of the world to maintain and elevate only leaders that come to be committed to "relentless respectful communication" as the most fundamental methodology they will bring to the process of political interaction.

Quakers at Friends Meeting at Cambridge invite others to copy and distribute this communication in the cause of peace. We are hopeful that this communication will be shared widely on social media and everywhere else. Please contact us if you or your group would like to be recorded as having endorsed this communication or if you need an electronic copy of this public message (office@fmcquaker.org).