

A different future *is* possible: Quaker organizations share a vision for peace in Palestine and Israel

April 12, 2024

For centuries, Quakers have worked for peace. This mission is a practical expression of the nonviolent message of the gospels and the teaching reflected in the many religions around the world: love your neighbor as yourself.

Quakers believe in the inherent worth of every individual and have a history of supporting both Palestinian and Israeli communities in the region. One of our organizations, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), established the first refugee camps in Gaza in 1949 and continues to work in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel today. Indeed, we have a longstanding presence in what is now Israel and Palestine, dating back to the 1800s. Quakers established the Ramallah Friends Schools over 150 years ago, one of the first institutions to educate Palestinian women. Palestinian Quakers continue to worship at the historic Friends Meeting House in Ramallah.

With these deep roots, we speak with firsthand knowledge. In a context where entrenched inequality, violence, and injustice have persisted for decades, we anticipated that desperation would eventually boil over - and sadly, it has.

The last six months have been marked by constant grief. The devastating attack by Hamas on October 7th in Israel claimed the lives of 1,163 Israelis and resulted in over 250 people being taken hostage. As of early April 2024, Israel's subsequent attacks on Gaza have killed at least 33,000 Palestinians, with thousands missing and presumed dead under the rubble.

Since October 7th, over 7,500 Palestinians from the West Bank and thousands more from Gaza, including children, have been imprisoned, many without charge or trial. Shockingly, more than 40 percent of those killed in Gaza have been children, surpassing the global count of child casualties in all other conflicts from 2019 to 2022. Countless children have been orphaned and maimed as a result.

In Gaza, hospitals, schools, universities, aid distribution centers, mosques, and churches have all been bombed and destroyed, leaving no safe space. Over 70% of homes have been damaged or destroyed, with more than 1.9 million people displaced.

Essential systems such as healthcare, water, and sanitation have collapsed, leading to preventable deaths, surgeries without anesthesia, and pregnant women giving birth in tents and without proper care.

AFSC staff in Gaza have shared horrendous accounts of starvation used as a tool of war. Children in Gaza are starving to death. The World Health Organization predicts that up to 80,000 more lives will be lost to disease and starvation if no immediate action is taken. This crisis surpasses anything many of us have witnessed in our decades of responding to disasters worldwide.

The continued restrictions on aid access and Israel's failure to respect and protect humanitarian workers have created an environment where it is nearly impossible for organizations to provide assistance. This

dire situation has pushed the Gaza population to the brink of extreme food insecurity and imminent famine. Hundreds of local and foreign aid workers have been targeted and killed, and AFSC's relief staff continue to face extreme insecurity, sharing with us that they are "still alive by chance."

Disturbingly, instead of increasing aid provisions, major actors such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and other members of the international community have cut off or delayed funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Unproven Israeli allegations linking UNRWA employees to the October 7th attack have had severe repercussions on the welfare of the most vulnerable population the agency serves.

Immediate action is needed so that killings and suffering can end. That starts with a permanent ceasefire, the release of hostages and prisoners, and unrestricted humanitarian access in Gaza.

In January, the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's actions in Gaza might constitute genocide. Regrettably, Israel has taken no steps to change its behavior since this ruling, ignoring the court's provisional measures. Western governments, especially the United States, the United Kingdom, and key European states, continue to provide arms and support to Israel. Their complicity, along with unilateral vetoes preventing repeated ceasefire resolutions at the UN Security Council, raises concerns about international commitments to multilateralism and respect for international legal frameworks.

Finally, Western leaders must look beyond this moment and work towards achieving a just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel. Violence is not limited to Gaza. More than 500 Palestinians, including more than 100 children, have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli soldiers and settlers since October 7. Settler and military violence has resulted in the complete depopulation of 16 Palestinian villages, causing fear and tension to permeate the whole population. Restricting worship and access to mosques and churches further infringes on freedom of worship and exacerbates tensions.

Over the last several years, a growing number of international human rights organizations have recognized Israel's treatment of Palestinians as meeting the [legal definition of apartheid](#). In the face of this pervasive injustice, Quakers stand firm in our witness, as we have throughout history against racial inequality, South African apartheid, and all forms of war.

Even in this time of violence and pain, we hold the belief that a different future, free from injustice and violence, is possible. Lasting peace and reconciliation will be realized when both past and ongoing injustices are acknowledged and addressed, ensuring freedom, dignity, equal rights, and justice for all people living in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Let us work together to make this vision a reality.

Now is the time for action. As Quakers and as peacemakers we are called to actively live into our testimonies of equality and peace. To this end, we urgently put forward these calls to action:

To the **Israeli** government:

1. End attacks on Gaza, commit to a permanent ceasefire, withdraw from reoccupied areas of Gaza, and end the Gaza blockade.
2. Cease settler and military violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
3. Guarantee uninterrupted, unconditional, swift, and adequate humanitarian access in Gaza and open land crossings.
4. Hold accountable those who have violated the law or committed human rights abuses, including settlers.
5. Release Palestinian political prisoners and hostages and provide fair trials following international standards free from coercion, torture, and abuse.
6. Guarantee the self-determination of Palestinians by ending its occupation of all Palestinian territory and ensure Palestinians and Israelis share equal human, political, and civil rights currently denied under Israeli Occupation.

To **Hamas** and other armed Palestinian groups:

1. Release Israeli hostages.
2. Commit to and maintain a permanent ceasefire as a long-term, just, and sustainable peace is sought.
3. Hold accountable those who have violated the law or committed human rights abuses.

To **Western leaders** and the US and UK governments in particular:

1. Urgently press for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and Israel.
2. End complicity in Israeli human rights violations and exert levers of power with immediate economic and political pressure on the government of Israel, including imposing an arms embargo.
3. Actively work to ensure uninterrupted humanitarian access in Gaza, especially through ground entry points, and commit to funding and protecting UNRWA.
4. Hold accountable those who have violated the law or committed human rights abuses.
5. Uphold international law, demand equal accountability for State and non-state actors, and enforce the ICJ provisions imposed on Israel.
6. Support an end to Israel's occupation and equal protection and rights for all.
7. Ensure an inclusive political process for peace that incorporates all voices, perspectives, and political factions, especially those marginalized or acting as potential spoilers and those most affected by injustice and violence.

As **Friends**, we will continue to support the global community of Quakers to:

1. Urgently call and fervently work for a permanent ceasefire and amplify our voices in our communities and at the local, state, and national levels.
2. Encourage decision-makers calling for a ceasefire and working for peace.
3. Organize and participate in teach-ins, actions, and protests until a ceasefire and a just and lasting peace are realized.
4. Actively support an end to Israel's occupation and equal protection and rights for all people living under Israeli control and commit to actions as meetings/churches until this reality is realized.
5. [Divest from corporations](#) profiting from militarism, including the occupation of Palestine.
6. Support those in Israel and Palestine who are working for peace.

Signed,

American Friends Service Committee
Canadian Friends Service Committee
Friends World Committee for Consultation
Quakers in Britain
Quaker Council on European Affairs
Quaker Peace and Social Witness
Quaker United Nations Office

The above Quaker organizations jointly drafted this statement. We invite all Friends meetings, churches, schools, and organizations to join us in endorsing this call for peace with justice. Sign onto the statement by following this link: www.afsc.org/visionforpeace.