

# Washington Newsletter

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FCNL advocates in Washington, D.C. Photo by Eric Bond/FCNL.

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Soon after the war started in 2015, FCNL began advocating to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition's war and the blockade of Yemen. Today, seven years later, we are still faithfully at it, consistent with our history of playing the long game.

# Staying the Course with Yemen

By Hassan El-Tayyab

Punctuated by unrelenting Saudi airstrikes and Houthi drone attacks, the Saudi-led coalition's war and blockade have led to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Millions of Yemenis require humanitarian aid for survival, and more than 2 million children under age 5 face acute malnutrition and death this year.

Glimmers of hope have appeared over the years, with Congress signaling that it would pass various iterations of the Yemen War Powers Resolution. Then in April 2022, optimism was restored by way of a truce—the first significant ceasefire since the war started.

In May, the Norwegian Refugee Council reported that Yemeni civilian deaths, mostly from Saudi airstrikes, had been reduced by 50% since the truce.

Largely due to the work of peace advocates, the truce, brokered by the United Nations, provides hope that real change is possible. Just as its extension was set to expire earlier this month, the warring parties agreed to another two-month extension, indicating an appetite for solutions to the unending devastation in Yemen.

Despite the truce, there are still severe restrictions on Yemen's ports and major roads, preventing crucial humanitarian aid from reaching those who need it most.

There is a lot of Quaker energy and support for solutions to the crisis in Yemen. FCNL Advocacy Teams, in collaboration with Yemeni Americans, faith organizations, peace organizations, and grassroots

advocates worldwide, are leading the charge.

Since January, FCNL Advocacy Teams have logged hundreds of lobby visits in support of the Yemen War Powers Resolution, to end U.S. complicity in the Yemen war.

By making clear that the U.S. won't resume military support to Saudi Arabia and its partners in the Yemen war, Congress can help keep the pressure on the warring parties and prevent the peace process from getting derailed.

The resolution will also send a message to President Joe Biden that his administration must keep his promise to end its complicity in the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

Congress already made history in 2019 by passing S.J.Res. 7, another Yemen War Powers Resolution. This was the first such resolution to pass both chambers of Congress since the original passage of the War Powers Act in 1973.

Then-President Donald Trump vetoed the bill, but it sent a powerful signal to the world that Congress and the American people wanted out of Yemen. That was just the motivation peace advocates needed to press on.

Since then, Congress has voted several times to end the Yemen war. The votes helped persuade the United Arab Emirates to draw down its forces in Yemen, spur a reduction in cross-border attacks by the Saudis and Houthis, and revive negotiations between the warring parties. The new Yemen War Powers resolution (H.J.Res. 87/S.J.Res. 56) has a lot of momentum."

Last year, President Biden started making good on his campaign promise of a policy reset on Yemen. He announced that the United States would end its support for "offensive" operations in the Saudi/UAE-led coalition's war.

He also announced plans to increase diplomatic efforts to end the war. However, he sent mixed signals through continued weapons sales and military support for the Saudi-led war effort.

Against this backdrop, FCNL Advocacy Teams have continued their work to avoid a calamitous breakdown in the current momentum towards peace.

FCNL staff recently organized a briefing on Capitol Hill, with representatives from Columbia Law School and Yemeni activist and scholar Shireen Al-Adeimi, to detail possible solutions to the Yemen war.

Yemeni voices—especially those of women like Al-Adeimi—are critical to explaining what is happening on the ground and connecting the dots between U.S. policy and the direct impact on people. The recent congressional briefing was a great example of elevating the voices of people impacted by this war.

Despite our incremental successes over the years, more needs to be done to bring lasting peace to Yemen and end its devastating humanitarian crisis. The U.S. Congress has significant leverage to do it, but we need to keep the pressure on.

*Hassan El-Tayyab is FCNL's legislative director for Middle East Policy.* [f](#)



▲ Advocacy Team members in Battleboro, VT, take their message to the public and representatives.

# Building Grassroots Momentum for Peace in Yemen

By Sarah Freeman-Woolpert

Grassroots advocates across the country have made a powerful impact on ending U.S. support for the war in Yemen. After Yemeni advocate Aisha Jumaan briefed us in January, our Advocacy Teams sprang into action. They conducted 65 lobby visits by 475 people in one month—the greatest number of visits in a single month since the program started in 2015.

As our campaign gained steam, advocates found creative ways to involve their friends and neighbors. Advocates in New Hampshire and Colorado led state-wide call-in days. The Sacramento, California team set up a “Lemonade for Yemen-Aid” stand at their local Earth Day event and talked to passersby about the connections between war and climate change.

Folks from Missouri to Rhode Island organized film screenings of the Oscar-nominated documentary “Hunger Ward” after FCNL hosted a national screening with the director.

Advocacy Teams have also sought new ways to build understanding and solidarity with people most impacted by the war. Each member of the New Orleans Advocacy Team looked up one fact about Yemen that does not have to do with the war.

They compiled this into a presentation about the country’s culture, architecture, food, and landscape, so the war would not be the only thing people knew about Yemen.

Other Advocacy Teams from Nevada and Michigan collaborated with Yemeni American activists to call members in Congress in June.

The energy around the country has only grown as we have seen the impact of our work.

Advocates felt encouraged at the start of Ramadan when a truce began in Yemen, which has now been extended for two more months, starting in August. This marks the longest period without airstrikes since the war began.

On May 31, the bipartisan H.J. Res 87, which directs the removal of U.S. military forces from the hostilities in Yemen, was introduced in the House with 42 cosponsors. On July 14, a companion bill, S.J. Res 56, was introduced in the Senate.

Advocacy Teams have found new opportunities to engage as the momentum towards peace continues to build—from a candidate’s forum in Wisconsin to a coalition picnic in Rhode Island.

In their advocacy, activists have connected their own personal stories to Yemen. One team member in New Hampshire told a story about meeting a woman in Vietnam whose husband was killed by a U.S. bomb, paid for by his tax dollars.

The Nashville, Tennessee, Advocacy Team met with Rep. Jim Cooper’s (TN-05) staff and shared powerful stories that made “the hair on the

back of [his] neck stand up.” The staff said that “that simply doesn’t happen” to him in typical lobby visits.

This issue has also strengthened relationships with members of Congress across the aisle. On one call, Rep. Susan Wild (PA-07) encouraged FCNL advocates to ask their members of Congress to reach out to other members to support H.J. Res. 87.

This energized two teams in Michigan to partner, asking their Democratic representatives to reach out to their Republican colleagues.

The only reason many members of Congress are even aware of the Yemen War Powers Resolution is because of FCNL’s passionate and persistent grassroots lobbyists across the country, according to FCNL staff.

“Your advocacy provides my colleagues and me with the sustained congressional pressure to help turn this temporary truce into a lasting peace agreement,” said Rep. Pramila Jayapal (WA-07).

*Sarah Freeman-Woolpert is the director of FCNL’s advocacy teams.*



Washington, D.C., Advocacy Teams members and FCNL lobbyists gathered in front of the White House in April to protest arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Photo by Eric Bond/FCNL.

## “It Takes All of Us,” Say Ramallah Students

By Hassan El-Tayyab

“It takes all of us” is the refrain of a song I wrote with a group of students at the Ramallah Friends School (RFS), a 150-year-old Quaker school in Palestine. Sung to the tune of Bill Withers and Grover Washington, Jr.’s 1980s hit, “Just the Two of Us,” the lyrics demonstrate the kids’ understanding of the conflict plaguing their region and how to solve it.

My time at RFS was part of my recent journey through Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPT). I wanted to better understand the Israeli occupation and blockade of Gaza from the perspectives of those living there and discuss ways to address these challenges.

I spent equal time in Israel and the oPT, speaking with stakeholders, taxi drivers, teachers, children, cooks, soldiers, nonprofit workers—anyone willing to share their experiences with me—to humanize and distill the magnitude of issues impacting this ancient land.

RFS was a particularly meaningful part of my trip. With over 1,500 students, it is the only school in Palestine offering a fully inclusive education to students, grounded in Quaker faith and principles. Even with restrictions under Israeli occupation, RFS continues to provide a world-class education to its students.

I spent time with second, fourth, fifth, sixth, and tenth graders discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict and what we do at FCNL to lobby for peace in the Middle East.

We also wrote songs about bullying, racism, and the occupied Palestinian Territory—songs like “It Takes All of Us.” I was grateful for the joyful break that the music provide the students but worries were never too far from view.

Tenth graders Leen and Bassem told me about a beloved teacher from their elementary school who had been captured, tortured, and detained for five years for protesting the conflict.

“He was just expressing his thoughts as a normal Palestinian would do,” Bassem said. “In Israeli prisons, they put you in a one-meter cell with a bag over your head. Imagine being left alone in a prison cell and not having any contact.” The students described their teacher now as “a shell of his former self.”

Rania Maayeh, RFS head of school, said these situations have had a chilling effect on free speech as many Palestinians who hope for political change fear they could suffer a similar fate.



Hassan El-Tayyab, with guitar, joined students at Ramallah Friends School to teach, listen, and play music. To hear their rendition of “It Takes All of Us,” use the QR code above or go to [fcnlorg/allofus](https://fcnlorg/allofus).

## BRAVE & CONSTANT

### Building the World We Seek

FCNL 2022 Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute

Join Quakers and friends from November 16–20, 2022, for worship, learning, fellowship, and action.

Our hybrid gathering will be based in Washington, D.C., and span the country.

[fcnlorg/annualmeeting](https://fcnlorg/annualmeeting)



On the last day of my trip, I woke to news of the murder of acclaimed al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. A CNN investigation indicated that it was likely Israeli soldiers who fired the bullet, but Israel has denied responsibility, and the United States has accepted this denial.

During a lively brainstorming about possible solutions to the conflict, I told the students about our advocacy efforts to end U.S. military participation in the Saudi-led war and blockade in Yemen.

The passage of the Yemen War Powers Resolution and other legislation to end U.S. military support for the war changed what was thought to be possible in Congress.

Although Congress has rarely voted to hold violators of Palestinian human rights accountable for their actions, persistent advocacy could change that.

I committed to the RFS students that we would push for congressional

votes that will finally start to shine a light and chip away at the inhumanity Palestinians face.

Even in these intense conversations, the RFS students’ innocence and optimism struck a nerve. They have had to grow up entirely too fast against the backdrop of travel restrictions, attacks on free speech, and an omnipresent threat of harassment and violence.

Nevertheless, their ability to develop the lyrics to “It Takes All of Us” is unsurprising. Built with a deep understanding of Quaker beliefs, RFS advocates for nonviolent conflict resolution and nurtures students to be “strong and sensitive members of their families, their community, and the world in which they live.”

Perhaps now is their moment to show us all what it means to see that of God in everyone.

*Hassan El-Tayyab is FCNL’s legislative director for Middle East Policy.*



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# Q&A: "We Helped Create this Mess"

With Stephen Zunes



*Stephen Zunes is a Quaker and a Middle East expert at the University of San Francisco. We spoke with him to learn more about the situation in Yemen and what Quakers can do to help.*

## What drew you to focus on the Middle East?

In part, it was due to my parents, who were unusual for people of their generation in that they were familiar with the Palestinian narrative and didn't fall into the idealistic view of Israel that was common during that period.

My father became a faculty advisor to the Arab student club at the University of North Carolina, so I got to know Arabs personally.

I also found the Middle East to be an interesting challenge from a peace perspective, as there was a lot of polarization on the topic even among those who agreed with critiques of U.S. foreign policy in other areas.

## How can the U.S. support the current truce and help chart a path to peace in Yemen?

First, we need to stop arming the Saudis and the Emiratis, who have been engaging in terror bombing and other war crimes.

Second, the United States should advocate for the original proposal that the Yemeni pro-democracy movement put forward during the mass nonviolent uprising in 2011.

It called for the establishment of a broad interim coalition government that would include everyone from the liberals to Marxists to the Houthis to moderate Islamists, which would then oversee multiparty elections.

The United States needs to acknowledge that we helped create this mess and work to support Yemeni civil society. Supporting nonviolent and pro-democracy elements in Yemen will go a lot further in ending the bloodshed than engaging in drone strikes and facilitating Saudi bombing.

## Yemen War Powers Resolutions have now been introduced in both chambers of Congress.

Congressional efforts like this are important. While foreign policy is primarily the prerogative of the

president, Congress can use the power of the purse to successfully limit the president from engaging in policies that are contrary to the values and beliefs of most Americans.

Polls show that the majority of Americans oppose unconditional arms transfers to the Saudis, so we don't need to convince people the policy is wrong. We need to mobilize this sentiment and pressure members of Congress to act on the will of the American people and stop enabling war crimes.

## What can the average citizen do to promote peace efforts in Yemen and the Middle East?

People can pressure Congress by engaging in the same kinds of tactics that have been used in the past to mobilize against controversial U.S. support for oppressive governments in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere.

That includes lobbying Congress to restrict U.S. support for the Saudis and Emiratis as well as engaging in vigils, demonstrations, and other public acts to raise awareness and show that there's a high level of disagreement with President Biden's current policies. There may even be some situations where civil disobedience is appropriate.

## What do Quaker beliefs have to offer from a foreign policy perspective?

We have seen repeatedly that immoral policies have been successfully challenged by a population that believes our country's foreign policy should better reflect its values.

Friends have generally been quite consistent in their support for human rights positions, so Quakers do well to lead this work. Friends played a disproportionate leadership role in opposing the Vietnam War, interventions in Central America, the economic support for apartheid South Africa, and so on. Friends can play a particularly important role regarding Yemen, too.

Interview by Alex Frandsen. 