

# Washington Newsletter

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# Investing in Local Power for Peace

By Ursala Knudsen-Latta



◀ In 2023, FCNL Advocacy Teams focused their lobbying on increasing funding for peacebuilding accounts.

**W**hen violence broke out between Christian and Muslim militias in the Central African Republic in 2013, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was able to leverage money from the Complex Crises Fund (CCF) to immediately address the violence.

USAID contracted the international NGO Mercy Corps to train 391 community leaders from diverse religious and tribal backgrounds in mediation, conflict analysis, and conflict resolution skills. The project also launched 91 economic projects that benefited both Christian and Muslim communities in the Central African Republic.

At the end of the 18-month program, Mercy Corps reported a 451% increase in community members' perceptions that conflicts were being resolved peacefully and an 178% increase in the number of people who trusted the 'other' group within their community. In December 2014, 220 fighters led by 10 separate commanders voluntarily disarmed to support nonviolent social change.

Projects like this prove that peacebuilding is a critical tool in addressing the seeds of violence at the local level. Peacebuilding is a long-term process that addresses the causes of violent conflict by resolving injustices in nonviolent ways. It transforms cultures and institutions that generate violent conflict to enable sustainable peace to take root.

Studies have shown that peacebuilding and conflict prevention is not only effective but is also cost-efficient. The Institute for Economics and Peace found that every dollar invested in peacebuilding "carries a potential \$16 reduction in the cost of armed conflict." However, U.S. support for this work has been persistently underfunded.

This year FCNL's Advocacy Teams have been lobbying Congress to invest in peace. Building on their work, participants to the FCNL Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute, Nov. 15-19, will lobby for continued investment in international peacebuilding under the theme: Local Power, Lasting Peace.

Participants will be lobbying Congress to make strong investments in three core accounts that support conflict prevention and peacebuilding: Complex Crises Fund, Atrocities Prevention, and Reconciliation Programs.

The Complex Crises Fund (CCF), which was used to diffuse the violence in the Central African Republic is the only account of its kind at USAID that fills immediate, short-term gaps during emergent crises.

The CCF was fully authorized in the Global Fragility Act of 2019, (P.L. 116-94) and enables USAID to prevent and respond to early warning signs of violence and escalating conflicts. FCNL advocated for the passage of this bill.

Atrocities Prevention is the State Department's only funding dedicated solely to supporting programs to prevent mass atrocities and genocide. It can also provide critical funding to support the implementation of the Elie Weisel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-441) and the 2022 U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities.

In the Darfur region bordering Sudan and the Central African Republic, Atrocities Prevention funds are being used by Invisible Children. They work with peacebuilders to establish local peace committees to prevent violence. They institutionalize nonviolent conflict resolution tools in local communities.

Invisible Children has documented around 680 incidents in the Darfur region where threats of violence were mitigated through the work of local peace committees. While the outbreak of widescale war in Sudan threatens the progress of peace committees, the



▲ Advocacy Teams have been using jelly beans to illustrate the imbalance between tax dollars devoted to military operations and those directed to peacemaking.

program offers a low-cost and low-risk opportunity for communities to engage in nonviolent conflict resolution and violence prevention.

The third peacebuilding account that FCNL is lobbying for is the Reconciliation Programs. They support the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic, religious, and political groups by addressing prejudices, promoting mutual trust and understanding, and facilitating non-violent conflict resolution.

Search for Common Ground is using Reconciliation Programs funds to address climate change and violent conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) Okapi Wildlife Reserve. They are working to address the threat of armed groups involved in natural resource exploitation and the conflict between the reserve's guards and the surrounding communities.

As a result of the project, the Indigenous communities and the Eco-Guards of the reserve regularly organize and participate in constructive dialogue. They have even successfully organized soccer matches and other social activities to build mutual trust.

*Ursala Knudsen-Latta is FCNL's legislative director for peacebuilding.* [f](#)

▲ Sports can help promote local peacebuilding, as shown by participants to a peace walk in Kenya receiving footballs and goal nets in Kenya. Photo by USAID.



The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom brought together more than 200,000 people of different races, ethnicities, economic circumstances, and faith traditions for a day of unity and hope. Coming off the high of that incredible moment, many people may have thought the worst days of our country's racist past were behind us.

That illusion was shattered 18 days later when dynamite exploded at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL, killing four little girls and injuring nearly two dozen more. Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins were in the basement as the Youth Day service was set to begin when the bomb planted by Ku Klux Klan exploded.

The church was a central meeting location in a town at the heart of the civil rights movement. In addition to being a prominent social and cultural center for the Black community, the 16th Street Baptist Church's proximity to the Birmingham City Hall made it ideal for civil rights meetings and rallies.

It was also a prime target for hate in a place where bombings became so common that the city earned the nickname "Bombingham."

The event shook Birmingham and the entire country. Even those who had become complacent with the status quo of racism, economic injustice, segregation, gerrymandering, and violence were disgusted enough to demand change.

In the decades that followed, our country did change. In many ways, it also remained the same.

I unexpectedly visited the 16th Street Baptist Church last August on my way to a reception for the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Convention at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. I was thinking more about work than history but the brick building against a beautiful post-storm sunset stopped me in my tracks.

Although I could not go inside, the energy of the exterior was enough to bring me to tears. From the original neon sign and national landmark plaque to the statues of the girls playing in the park on the opposite corner, I was overwhelmed.

◀ The 16th Street Baptist Church at dusk and "Four Spirits" sculpture by Elizabeth MacQueen, unveiled in 2013 for the 50th anniversary of the bombing. Photos by Kristen Archer/FCNL.

We are not living in easy times. With the environment disintegrating, endless wars catalyzing humanitarian crises, rampant gun violence destroying our communities, and—this just in—12.4% of U.S. children living in poverty, despair almost seems warranted. I am certain the same was true for the 16th Street Baptist Church community, Birmingham, Alabama, and our country back then.

Just as the 1963 March on Washington did not bring immediate change and the 2008 election of the first Black U.S. president did not result in a "post-racial America," the "racial awakening" of 2020 did not end the indiscriminate killing of unarmed Black people. Racism, xenophobia, and social and economic injustices abound despite efforts to deny they ever existed.

What struck me about the statues across the street from the church and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute were the intersections: the beauty and hope that coexisted alongside indescribable pain.

Indeed, this hope does not erase the horrors. Survivors continue to live with the trauma they experienced that fateful day. Yet, this duality propels our advocacy. We continue this work amid circumstances that are often immensely disheartening because we believe that at some point, our advocacy will help bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice.

As FCNL Executive Secretary Emeritus Joe Volk has said, "Things have been bad before, but we keep going." The families of those four little girls and the other survivors deserve at least that. [f](#)





## Remembering the Largest Peace Demonstration

By Joe Volk

When we start our annual meeting on Nov. 15, 2023, it marks milestones in our country and our FCNL community. It formally marks our 80th anniversary as an advocacy organization and the opening of our first office in Washington, DC.

Just as significantly, it also marks the 54th anniversary of the Moratorium and Mobilization to end the U.S. War in Vietnam in 1969. That march was participated in by up to 250,000 nonviolent peace activists to Washington, D.C. At that time, it was clearly the largest peace demonstration in our country's history.

While I may not remember what I did on other dates in the past, I clearly remember what I was doing on Nov. 15, 1969. I was in Washington, D.C., demonstrating with friends and college classmates, plus another couple hundred thousand deeply concerned people.

◀ Anti-Vietnam War demonstrators march along Pennsylvania Avenue towards the White House during the Moratorium Day March on Washington, D.C., Nov. 15, 1969. AP Photo.

I was 24 years old; a veteran of the U.S. Army who had refused orders to go to Vietnam; a graduate student at Miami University, Oxford, OH.

As we wended our way through the streets of Washington, D.C., we called for an end to the Vietnam War "right now!"


As I marched, my buddies in A Troop/4th of the 12th Cav/5th Division who were now in Vietnam were very much on my mind. I wanted them brought home immediately.

On the 80th anniversary of FCNL and the 54th anniversary of the largest peace demonstration, we might want to recall how many of us were called to demonstrate in our nation's capital.

Back in 1969, I did not know the Friends Committee on National Legislation. I did not know how FCNL staff and governors had labored with other peace advocates to bring me and thousands of others to D.C. on November 15. Yet somehow the FCNL community knew that I and others needed and sought opportunities to exercise our conscience in the public square. They helped me to find an opening. FCNL connected with me even when I didn't know it.

I did not know then, until decades later, that the Moratorium and Mobilization demonstration actually made an impact that saved lives and changed U.S. policy. Robert Levering, producer of the PBS documentary *The Movement and the "Madman,"* wrote in an article that the demonstrations foiled then-President Richard Nixon's plans to dramatically escalate the Vietnam War.

He quoted Admiral Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Nixon administration, saying the Moratorium and the Mobilization "served to inhibit and restrain the decision makers ... both in the executive and legislative branches of the government."

As we mark these anniversaries, let us be reminded that FCNL's work to translate movement demands into legislative policy proposals made a difference then—and they still do today. 

*Joe Volk was Executive Secretary of FCNL from 1990-2011.*

## "We Condemn All Violence Against Civilians"

FCNL's statement on Israel and Palestine




The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) condemns the attack by Hamas on Israel and Israel's retaliatory violence while calling on world leaders to press for de-escalation and restraint in Gaza and southern Israel moving forward. FCNL also reminded policymakers that violence committed by Hamas does not justify the collective punishment of nearly two million Palestinian civilians living in Gaza.

"As Quakers, we deeply mourn the loss of all lives and pray for those who have lost loved ones due to this latest escalation," said Bridget Moix, FCNL's general secretary. "We firmly condemn all violence against civilians and urge the U.S. government and global leaders to prioritize an immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and restraint to prevent further civilian harm."

These tragic events, including the deaths of hundreds of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and the taking of dozens of hostages, underscore the pressing need to ensure self-determination, equality, and fundamental human rights for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Authentic security is attainable through the promotion

of a culture of peace, including a healthy environment, economic opportunity, democratic participation, access to education, and personal well-being.

"True peace can only be achieved through peaceful means," said Hassan El-Tayyab, FCNL's legislative director for Middle East policy. "These terrible attacks and violent response increase our resolve to protect innocent life and advocate for an end to all forms of injustice in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Policymakers in the United States must refrain from further militarizing this conflict and work to ensure that our military assistance is never used to violate Palestinian human rights.

"Only by addressing core systemic issues, including decades of institutionalized oppression and collective punishment of Palestinians through brutal military occupation and a 16-year Gaza blockade, will Israelis and Palestinians live in peace." 

Urge your member of Congress to de-escalate the violence in Israel and Palestine at [www.fcnl.org/deescalate](http://www.fcnl.org/deescalate).

# No One Will Win if this War Escalates

By Odeliya Matter

In recent days, I've counted losses that I still cannot comprehend—of friends I loved and faces I will never see again. As we speak, people I know are being held hostage by Hamas. I have family in imminent danger on the border with Gaza and friends who will never be the same after the trauma that they've experienced.

I've also lost touch with all my friends in Gaza as they've been cut off from electricity, internet, or any other means of communication. I learned that two of them have lost their homes. Others have lost loved ones. One of their neighbors' entire family of 15 was killed instantly in a bombing. We're seeing entire residential neighborhoods with entire families leveled to rubble.

Testimonies of slaughter and gruesome images keep flooding our feeds from all directions. Dehumanizing rhetoric and calls to completely level Gaza, with over 2 million residents, are becoming increasingly normalized among

Israeli and American officials, as the United States has indicated full support for any form of indiscriminate retaliation or collective punishment Israel should choose. Meanwhile, hostages in Gaza are at risk of being killed by either Hamas or the Israeli army avenging their capture.

It's critical that officials in the U.S. do everything in their power to help secure the release of hostages. But we need your help to urge members of Congress and the Biden administration to also publicly call for an immediate ceasefire, de-escalation of violence, and creating a humanitarian corridor to expedite emergency relief to civilians in Gaza.

As an Israeli who also cares about Palestinian lives, this is a meaningful, effective way you can take action to bring us closer to an end to this nightmare.

*Odeliya Matter, an Israeli American, is FCNL's program assistant for Middle East policy.*



Odeliya recently shared how the devastating violence in Israel and Palestine has impacted her personally. Her video can be seen at [fcnl.org/deescalatevideo](https://fcnl.org/deescalatevideo) or scan the QR code with your smartphone's camera



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**Cover Photo:** Bridget Moix, FCNL general secretary, and other faith leaders regularly lobby members of Congress and the White House. Photo by DAG Photo/FCNL.

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