

## **Minute by Blacksburg (VA) Friends Meeting – Approved December 12, 2023**

As Quakers we believe in the sacred worth of each person and stand against violence in all its forms. We grieve for the loss of each life, and with those in Israel and Palestine who are losing loved ones. We pray with those waiting for the return of loved ones and those living under siege and bombardment. We condemn the violence unleashed by Hamas, and we denounce the retribution of the Israeli Defense Force on Gaza.

We join with many millions across the world to call for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access, an end to the catastrophic bombing of civilian Gaza, and action to address the inequalities underlying this situation so as to create the conditions for a lasting peace.

We urge our government to halt the US enabling Israel's extraordinary violence against the people in Gaza, through the supply of weapons and by the shameful veto of the UN call for ceasefire. Our participation not only escalates the build-up of hatred, it also escalates the potential for a wider war in the Middle East. We believe our government must call for an immediate ceasefire, immediate and adequate humanitarian aid, and immediate negotiations for a long-term peace.

Further military action will not bring peace. History shows us that retaliatory violence is a failure (witness the wars of retribution in Iraq and Afghanistan). Violence only begets more violence. There are no winners.

Violence such as this is never justifiable, and we insist that a ceasefire must be realized along with the return of all hostages. The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 killed over 1,300 Israelis, and civilian hostages were taken by Hamas into Gaza. The subsequent Israeli military attack on Gaza has already killed more than 18,000 Palestinians, primarily women and children, displaced more than one million Palestinians in Gaza, destroyed homes and hospitals. The ongoing siege of Gaza blocks access to water, food, fuel, electricity, and medicine to all people in Gaza. People are going hungry and thirsty, thousands are injured, and overwhelmed medical facilities cannot help those in need. People are dying as a preventable humanitarian crisis deepens.

The many faith traditions represented in the region share a religious obligation to feed the hungry, care for the sick and wounded, and protect the most vulnerable from violence. This fundamental human obligation undergirds the moral authority of International Humanitarian Law. We urge the combatants, our government, and the entire international community to respect the 4th Geneva Convention for the Protection of Civilians in War.

We also call on all of us – from national and international leaders to religious bodies, media and people in their communities whether impacted or removed from this war -- to firmly disavow dehumanizing anti-Palestinian and anti-Semitic rhetoric and approaches that deepen painful divisions and politicize the current crisis. Our conviction that peace will prevail on earth, as the scriptures of the great religions of the world have promised, requires this of each of us, for humanity to regain its footing amid such incredible violence and suffering. This is a time for strong moral resolve, spiritual fortitude, and immediate action.