Concern for the Humanitarian Crisis and Suffering in Gaza and Palestine, June 2025

The Northern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Quakers of the Upper Midwest of North America, wish to voice our opposition to the deliberate starvation and destruction of civilians' lives and properties in Gaza by the government of Israel. We also oppose the violent assault, murder of civilians, and destruction of Palestinian property on the West Bank supported by the Israeli Government. We write with urgency, as many civilians in Gaza are dying daily by starvation and disease without relief, or directly by the hands of the Israeli military. We have heard directly from Quaker staff working in Gaza, of the despair and hopelessness of the people there trying to live among the rubble and destruction. Quakers have a long history of involvement in the region beginning with the establishment of the Ramallah Friends School in 1869, and expanding with the American Friends Service Committee's programs beginning in 1948 and continuing through the present.

As Quakers, we believe that there is a sacred core and value in each life. From this we are compelled to seek a world free of war, a society with equity and justice for all, and a community where every person's potential can be fulfilled. We feel keenly the pain and despair that violence and injustice cause and note with sadness the self-perpetuating cycle as pain unjustly inflicted induces hatred, fear and a desire for revenge. This cycle defines too much of the history of the Palestinian and Israeli people. This did not begin with Hamas' attack on Israelis on Oct. 7, 2023 nor do we believe it can end with the deliberate starvation and destruction of civilian lives in Gaza and the West Bank. We speak to these issues humbly, recognizing that at times our own government has perpetrated and been complicit with violence and injustice. But we say it does not have to be this way. There are choices to be made, and another way to live in the world. We believe that unjust and violent means cannot be used to achieve some future desired goal. Peace is not only the goal, but peaceful actions are the building blocks towards achieving that goal.

From afar, we watched with horror the attack on Israeli citizens by Hamas on 7 October, 2023, and we condemn this great cruelty. We know that we cannot fully understand the pain and fear that this attack created for Israelis given their long history of persecution. We now witness the ongoing unspeakable pain for those families who have lost loved ones to this terrible violence, and for those who wait with a mixture of hope and dread for any news about the possible release of captive loved ones.

Since that time, we have watched the extreme and cruel response of the Israeli government to inflict death and destruction on the civilians of Gaza while ostensibly seeking to eliminate Hamas. According to the Gaza Health Ministry, over 55,000

Gazans have been killed since October 2023. Countless others are injured or missing. Hospitals and schools, refugee camps, churches and mosques, civilian housing, water and sewer infrastructure have been bombed and destroyed. Borders to the outside world have been closed so that food and water and vital medical supplies can get in only in minimal and inadequate quantities. As a result, much of the population of Gaza is malnourished and/or starving to death. Tens of thousands of children who need adequate nutrition for proper body and brain development are not getting it, and will be permanently damaged as a result. The grief and emotional trauma of children losing parents and of civilians losing family members will be experienced for a lifetime and in generations to come. Internationally sponsored flotillas loaded with relief supplies have been blocked from entry. Many aid workers and journalists have been killed. Gazans flocking to access meagre food supplies have been gunned down and killed. Most Gazans have been displaced. Even by July 2024, Doctors Without Borders reported that approximately 90% of Gazans had been displaced. Many have now been displaced multiple times, with no safe space to which they can go for refuge. No one can undo what Hamas did on Oct. 7, 2023 but this response is not the way to break the cycle of violence. We say this assault on the people of Gaza must stop.

We are also acutely aware of violations of Palestinian rights, destruction and seizure of property, harassment of students, attacks and killings of peaceful Palestinians on the West Bank. We witness continued intrusion by Israeli settlers into the West Bank, supported by the Israeli Government, and unjust and provocative seizure of Palestinian property which can only stir unrest and sow further seeds of conflict and violence. We say that this, too, must stop.

And we believe this must stop not just for the benefit of the Palestinians, but for the benefit of Israelis. We recognize that the policies of the Israeli Government, which are responsible for these atrocities, do not reflect the wishes of all the people of Israel, many of whom are actively working for peace and against this war. And we understand all too well what such divisions can do to a society. Further, we believe the Israeli Government is asking its soldiers to act in cruel and unjust ways that will cause great moral and emotional injury to them which will be a burden borne by the Israeli people for years. We cannot engage in inhumane acts without these acts impacting our own humanity. We also understand this all too well from our own history. Finally, we resist any attempt to use our statement to fuel antisemitism. We support the right of the Jewish people to live in peace but that does not compel us to support every action that Israel takes.

What can be done as we witness historic cruelty and inhumanity towards Palestinian

civilians by the Israeli Government and towards Israeli citizens by Hamas? As a start, we in Northern Yearly Meeting ask that those who represent us in government:

1. Work for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza to prevent further loss of life.
2. Prohibit the transfer of more lethal offensive weapons and military assistance to Israel.
3. Support the immediate release by Hamas of all hostages and the immediate release by Israel of all Palestinian prisoners.
4. Prioritize the protection of all civilians by urgently permitting humanitarian aid to freely enter Gaza and Lebanon, fully funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees.
5. Publicly call for an end to further annexation and Israeli settler violence in the West Bank.
6. Work diplomatically to support regional de-escalation across the Middle East.
7. Urge all parties to fully respect international humanitarian laws.

We will be praying for healing for both sides of this conflict and for peace in the region. History will be watching.