



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

August 2021

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Call to witness and action for Palestinian people

Several documents related to the injustices experienced by Palestinian people were recently shared by Lydia Brenneman, a credentialed leader in Central District Conference, and by Lima (Ohio) Mennonite Church. The documents originated in Western District Conference, but they call all of us to keep our attention on the suffering of the Palestinians and to take action on their behalf. Below is one of these documents followed by additional resources.

Violence in Palestine and Israel

Recent violence in Palestine and Israel has been heartbreaking. Gaza is one of the poorest and most densely populated areas in the world. Gaza experiences a crippling Israeli blockade and is described by some as an “open air prison.” Electricity is limited to three to four hours a day with 95% of their water undrinkable. Recent Israeli bombings left 232 Gazans dead including 65 children. Additionally, 1,760 Gazans were injured, and 50,000 became homeless.

Israel suffered the deaths of 12 residents including two children due to Hamas rockets.

We serve on a task force on behalf of the Western District Conference (Mennonite Church USA) to facilitate relationships between Mennonite churches and various groups in Gaza. We have come to know people in Gaza who are working to improve their community despite great obstacles. Their work in education, entrepreneurship and humanitarian aid is inspiring. These community leaders have been sending us pictures of the violence and devastation that has occurred in Gaza. Many hospitals, schools, businesses and apartment complexes were destroyed. We believe that our friends in Gaza are as fully human and made in the image of God as are those living in Israel, the United States, or anywhere else in the world.

We are against the use of violence to further political objectives. Loving our enemies and following Jesus' nonviolent teachings is a bedrock of our Mennonite faith. Whether



A Palestinian searches through rubble of his destroyed home hit by Israeli strikes in Towers Al-andaa—the northern Gaza Strip. UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan; Gaza; Photo ID: 597032; Scenes from Gaza Crisis; Creative Commons license.



Global Panorama; Palestinian Child; Image Courtesy: Charity Organisation (www.flickr.com/photos/syedaa-minatrust/14654698782) Creative Commons license.



UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan; Gaza; Photo ID: 597032; Palestinians collect their belongings from under the rubble of a residential tower, which witnesses said was destroyed by an Israeli air strike in Gaza City. Creative Commons license.

it be Hamas or the Israeli Defense Forces, launching rockets and missiles that injure and kill innocent civilians is reprehensible and unacceptable. However, our society tends to deem Palestinian violence as terrorism while simultaneously justifying Israel's violence as necessary. In addition, the United States gives Israel around four billion dollars annually, which supports Israel's military efforts against Palestinians. With such a disparity of support, both ideologically and financially, it is difficult to see how the US could be an arbiter of peace in this conflict.

The undemocratic, systemic injustice of occupation and the suffering and lack of resources of the Palestinian people need to be addressed before any lasting peace can be made.

We encourage you to contact your US legislators to ask them to stop fueling the humanitarian crisis in Palestine/Israel. The undemocratic, systemic injustice of occupation and the suffering and lack of resources of the

Palestinian people need to be addressed before any lasting peace can be made. If you would like to aid the relief and rebuilding efforts in Gaza, we encourage you to donate to the Middle East Children's Alliance at mecaforpeace.org.

Israel Palestine Task Force; Robert Atchison, Manhattan; Katie Mitchell Koch, Wichita; Esther Koontz, North Newton; Kathy Neufeld Dunn, McPherson

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Additional resources

Concerns about Palestinians have been a focus of Mennonite Church USA and Central District Conference over recent years. Following are resources and reports that can help individuals and congregations learn more and take steps to support them and call for greater justice.

Mennonite USA Resolution:

Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine

Passed at Mennonite Church USA convention in Orlando, Fla., 2017.

The summary states:

"As followers of Jesus and his gospel of reconciliation, we long for peace, security, and the well-being of all people living in Israel and Palestine.

"We have heard the cry for justice of Palestinians, especially those living under oppressive military occupation for fifty years. We are also acutely aware of antisemitism and violence inflicted upon Jews in the past and the present. The suffering of these two groups has too often been set against the other. We recognize, rather, that the legacy of Jewish suffering is intertwined with the suffering of Palestinians

"We confess that we, as Mennonites, as Christians, and as Americans, bear some responsibilities for the injustice and violence

that both peoples have experienced historically and currently. We commit ourselves to take active and specific steps to redress these harms. On one hand, we will oppose military occupation and seek a just peace in Israel and Palestine; on the other, we will seek deeper relationships with Jewish communities and actively oppose antisemitism."

Website: This is partheid: https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20210112_this_is_apartheid

Website: A threshold crossed: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution#>

focus, February 2020: Summary of presentation by Anita Rediger (retired CDC pastor) and information about Mennonite Twinning Initiative (<https://mennopin.org/mennonite-twinning-initiative-with-gaza/>)

Reporter, July 2016: Summary of Central District Conference Annual Meeting presentation by Rev. Dr. Alex Awad. (See page 3.)

focus is published by the Central District Conference, Mennonite Church USA. To be added to the email subscription list, contact the editor, Mary E. Klassen, at cdceditor@gmail.com.

Central District Conference
www.mcusacdc.org office@mcusacdc.org
800.662.2264