Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Called Interim Meeting

April 20, 2024

(by Zoom)

**I2024-16. Opening**. After a period of open worship, Clerk Thomas Webb (“T-Dubb”) read the land acknowledgement, honoring those who once cared for the land we now occupy. He introduced Deborah Haines, Alexandria, Recording Clerk, and Sarah Gillooly, General Secretary who will be the technical host, and explained the procedures we will be using today in this virtual space. He reminded us that we will be approaching today’s business in a spirit of worship, not to share our opinions, but to seek guidance from the Spirit. He asked that we speak only once, except when we wish to withdraw a previously expressed objection, or to ask a clarifying question.

Thomas Webb read the anti-racism queries that will guide our decision-making today.

He introduced the single agenda item for today’s meeting, which is a minute drafted by the Peace and Social Concerns Committee addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The draft was circulated with the link to today’s meeting.

**I2024-17. Call for a Cease-Fire in Gaza**. Barbara Bezdek, Homewood, presented on behalf of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee. She explained that there are two drafts under consideration today: one is quite short, and one includes more information about the situation in Gaza, and a more detailed description of our position. We may approve both versions, to be used as appropriate in reaching out to decision makers and the public, or choose to approve only one.

Barbara read the shorter version, and made sure that we all have access to a copy of it. It is inserted here:

**As Quakers we believe** in the sacred worth of each person and our historic Peace Testimony prompts us to 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 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 create the conditions for a lasting peace.

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 and 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. **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.

We settled into worship.

Barbara then turned to the longer version. She read the one additional sentence in the first paragraph, and the three additional paragraphs that are not included in the shorter version. The entire text is inserted here:

**As Quakers we believe** in the sacred worth of each person and our historic Peace Testimony requires us to 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 killing of civilians by Hamas, and the massive retaliation by 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 take the steps necessary 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 repeated vetoes of the UN calls for ceasefire. Our US 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. We insist that a ceasefire must be realized along with the return of all hostages and of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons on administrative detention.

We wish the U.S. had moved more quickly to support a strong UN resolution consistent with our concerns, and we recognize recent shifts in US approach: the Administration’s decision allowing the March 25 resolution to pass, the executive order against violent Israeli West Bank settlers, pressing Israel to take energetic action against those settlers, directly increasing food and medical aide to Palestinian civilian, and efforts to persuade Israel not to undertake a major military action at Rafah. These are important steps to create the conditions for peace that lasts. 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, and the long history of conflict that pre-dates the current war). Violence only begets more violence. There are no winners.

The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 resulted in the death of over 1,300 Israelis, and Hamas took 240 civilian hostages into Gaza. The subsequent Israeli military attack on Gaza has killed 33,000 Palestinian as of this writing, primarily women and children. Even this count omits those maimed or remaining under rubble. The very numbers obscure the humanity of each life extinguished, the displacement of more than one million Palestinians in Gaza, the utter destruction of homes, hospitals, towns. Israel’s ongoing siege blocks access to water, food, fuel, electricity, and medicine to all people in Gaza. People are starving, thousands are injured, and most are ill due to the lack of drinkable water, adequate shelter and medicines. 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.

A Friend suggested that we approve the short minute, and make the additional material included in the longer version into a separate informational section that could be attached to the minute or made available separately. A Friend noted that a minute describing historical context will go out of date, while the short minute is prophetic and timeless. A Friend noted that the informational section could be regularly updated if it were made available online. Several Friends stressed the importance and impact of the deeply disturbing information included in the longer minute. A Friend spoke in favor of the shorter version, because it is more likely to be read, and because it avoids accusatory language and is therefore a clearer expression of our witness for peace. We were reminded that there are very many reasons for us to grieve, including injustice and oppression here at home.

Clerk Thomas Webb asked us to consider how we might make the information in the longer version available, if we approve the shorter version as the statement of our witness for peace.

A Friend urged us to be bold in speaking the truth, in particular the truth that innocent children are being killed in Gaza, and this must stop. A Friend reminded us that we can help mediate conflict by working with both sides, but we cannot resolve conflict by imposing our own solution, no matter how deeply we believe in it.

Clerk Thomas Webb asked if we are in unity with the shorter minute, understanding that we will continue our discernment. Some Friends expressed the feeling that this does not go far enough. The Clerk explained that the longer version will be included in the record of this meeting, and that Peace and Social Concerns will be asked to keep the yearly meeting apprised concerning its further discernment.

Friends APPROVED the shorter version of the minute with this understanding.

Friends APPROVED asking the Peace and Social Concerns Committee to bring a report to the Yearly Meeting as soon as possible recommending a response to our government’s support of military operations in defiance of international and United States law.

**I2024-18. Closing**. The meeting closed at 3:20 pm, after a period of open worship.

Clerk Thomas Webb announced that the next Interim Meeting will be at Goose Creek on June 8. The revised minute being prepared by the Reproductive Justice Working Group was not ready for today’s session, but will be presented in June.