

Op-Ed on Gaza-Israel by the Philadelphia Peace Walk co-founders – updated 3/5/24

The Philadelphia Interfaith Walk for Peace and Reconciliation (“[Peace Walk](#)”) held its first of 20 annual local Walks in 2004, 2½ years after the attack on the World Trade Center and a year after the U.S. started the war in Iraq. It was a time of anger, mistrust, and a call for revenge in the U.S., though we (and others) had a different idea—to seek peace and justice by bridging differences among faith-based groups, focusing on common ground and compassionately listening to each other.

Over the years through the Peace Walks, programs, reflections, and other shared activities, we built trust among Jews, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Quakers, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha’is and others. At times of intolerance and persecution, we stood by each other and took action—as when someone threw a pig’s head at Al Aqsa Islamic Center, when the TSA forced Sikh men to remove their turbans at airport checks (a religious sacrilege), when Jewish cemeteries were desecrated, when Islamophobic ads appeared on SEPTA transit, and during the Israel-Gaza war in 2008-09. Reconciliation—and changes in policy to not target specific ethnic/religious groups—followed in many of these cases.

We are in the midst of another humanitarian catastrophe now in Israel-Gaza that is causing massive loss of innocent lives there and significant rancor and mistrust in our faith communities in the U.S. The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 resulted in over 1,200 Israeli deaths and the taking of 240 hostages. Israel’s large-scale bombing response in Gaza to destroy Hamas has now killed more than 30,000 Gazans and wounded over 72,000 more, including many women and children; destroyed hospitals and places of habitation and refuge; and left many on the verge of starvation. Despite enormous international pressure to stop the collective punishment against the Palestinian people, including the International Court of Justice’s recent ruling requiring Israel to take “all measures” to prevent acts of genocide, there has been no ceasefire, and the war continues.

As co-founders of the Philadelphia Interfaith Peace Walk, we firmly believe that the cycle of violence in Israel-Palestine will see no winner, and we strongly support a diplomatic and just resolution to this fighting. We urge the warring parties to follow the lead of joint Israeli-Palestinian groups such as [Combatants for Peace](#) and the [Israeli Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace / Circle of Bereaved Families](#)—where those who have lost family members on both sides have come together through their mutual suffering and trauma to urge a compassionate, non-violent way to a just and lasting solution (whether one state, two states or a federation)—with equal rights under the law for all people.

These exemplary groups come from premises consistent with the basic religious tenets of the Abrahamic faiths—seeing the face of God in every human being; creating people in nations and tribes so that they may know one another; pursuing justice; loving your neighbor as yourself; and feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless.

While we welcome our government’s reported urging of Israel to abate its heavy bombing strategy, and its recent sanctions on militant settlers in the West Bank, the Biden administration’s actions in continuing to supply additional military hardware to Israel during the siege of Gaza seems only to be prolonging the assault.

Rather, we urge an immediate, permanent ceasefire in line with international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the UN General Assembly’s ceasefire resolution that 153 nations approved in December; humanitarian assistance including food, clean water, medical supplies, and safe shelter; safe corridors within Gaza for people and supplies; and a hostage-prisoner exchange—followed by a just, secure and lasting peace for all people. In this way, may the Israeli and Palestinian people realize the words of harmony and reconciliation of our faith traditions in one of the holiest places on earth.

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