



## Addressing Common Objections To Signing The Pledge - Quakers

*Many concerns and hesitations can emerge when a Quaker congregation or organization begins to discern together whether they should endorse the Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge and join the interfaith movement for peace, justice, and equality for everyone living in Palestine/Israel. Steve Chase, the co-clerk of Friends Meeting of Washington's Peace and Social Concerns Committee, wrote [an eye-opening article](#) about how his meeting faithfully addressed such concerns and hesitations--and it is worth a read. However, in this document, we would like to simply name some of the most common concerns we have seen raised and explain how the Apartheid-Free Communities Quaker Affinity Group suggests you might address them.*

**We are not knowledgeable enough about what is going on in Palestine/Israel to take a bold and potentially controversial stand.**

There should not be anything particularly controversial among Friends for taking a stand for peace, justice, and equality for all and then engaging in nonviolent action to achieve this vision. That said, lack of knowledge or misinformation about the actual facts on the ground in Palestine/Israel is a real barrier to faithful discernment among Friends. This is a fixable problem. Friends can engage in thoughtful dialogue, share their moral reasoning with each other, and engage in many forms of mutual learning on the historical roots and current human rights situation in Palestine/Israel—and our nations' complicity. Educating yourself and your congregation about Israeli apartheid is a great first step in considering endorsing the pledge—and will also be needed afterwards.

The Apartheid-Free Communities coalition website ([apartheid-free.org](http://apartheid-free.org)) and its Quaker Affinity Group page ([apartheid-free.org/quakers](http://apartheid-free.org/quakers)) are filled with educational resources including short films, human rights reports, expert analysis, Bible Studies and denominational statements. The [FAQ](#) offers great initial insights into the background and usefulness of the pledge. We also highly recommend bringing in Palestinian and Jewish peace and justice activists to talk with your congregation, as well as inviting knowledgeable Quaker activists who have researched the issue, visited Palestine/Israel, and/or worked for a just peace in Palestine/Israel through various organizations (both Quaker and non-Quaker). Such folks have much wisdom to share.



**I worry that joining Apartheid-Free Communities will negatively affect our interfaith relationships?**

If your interfaith partnerships are focused on the common moral ground of fostering peace, justice and equality for everyone, adopting the Pledge is a powerful way to further your joint efforts. If your interfaith partnerships refuse to address the human rights situation in Palestine/Israel, you have likely already silenced or alienated some of your interfaith partners. Still, it is true that taking the Pledge might be controversial with some of your interfaith partners, but there are many debates and dialogues to have with our interfaith partners on many issues. We can dialogue respectfully, while also standing up for a faithful Quaker commitment to oppose human rights abuses and stand up for peace, justice, and equality for all in our many interfaith settings.

**I'm particularly afraid of alienating my Jewish friends or colleagues.**

It is true that some of your Jewish friends may be uncomfortable with your Quaker congregation's work on ending complicity with Israeli apartheid, military occupation, and settler colonialism. If so, this may cause some conflict. Doing the work of challenging deeply entrenched and systemic injustice is always bound to alienate some people. Yet, there is no single Jewish viewpoint on this question. Jews around the world have a wide range of responses to the State of Israel and its actions towards Palestinians, just as Christians do. We encourage you to build relationships with several of the Jewish communities who have already signed the Apartheid-Free pledge and are standing up for the prophetic Jewish values of peace, justice, and equality for all of God's children.

Nor should we demonize those of our Jewish friends who--out of fear, unconscious bias, or misinformation--can't yet see the unjust reality of Israeli apartheid and military occupation that has now become increasingly genocidal. Remember, it took the Religious Society of Friends one hundred years to speak in one voice against the social evil of enslaving other human beings. Let's have a little humility as we engage in difficult conversations about the oppressive nature of Israeli apartheid. The goal is not to "call people out," but to "call people in" to deeper insight and faithfulness. Quakers have had to do this with each other in the past and still need to now. If your congregation, for example, is actively addressing the continuing effects of Jim Crow apartheid in the U.S., drawing on the same skills to navigate this essential, but difficult, conversation can be very helpful.

**I fear we will be called antisemitic.**



It is not antisemitic to hold a country engaging in (or enabling) the crime of apartheid accountable for its actions. Yet, it is true that false charges of antisemitism are commonly used by organized interests that support the status quo in Palestine/Israel to silence those who support human rights for Palestinians. It is therefore important to be faithful to our historic testimonies of peace, justice, and equality for all and not let the fear of being falsely labeled antisemitic silence our faith community's commitment to work to end Israel's policies of apartheid, military occupation, and settler colonialism. Remember the words of Jesus, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account...for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt 5:11-12).

The Apartheid-Free Pledge also includes a commitment to address all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression, including antisemitism, islamophobia, and anti-Palestinian racism. We believe that when false charges of antisemitism become weaponized to silence the work of freedom, justice and equality for Palestinians, it actually increases the harm of genuine antisemitism and promotes negative, anti-Jewish stereotypes. We think hesitant Friends can gain insight and courage by studying [the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#) and the other resources on antisemitism available on the Apartheid-Free Communities website. Standing up for both Palestinian and Jewish rights is possible—and needed.

### **Does adopting the pledge mean we oppose Israel's existence?**

The goal of the pledge is for Israel to stop engaging in legalized, structural, and governmental practices of injustice and human rights abuse against Palestinians. In other words, it is focused on *how* Israel conducts itself, not whether or not it should exist. This can be compared to the work of the movement to end the Jim Crow system of apartheid in the United States. The Civil Rights movement was not about challenging the U.S.'s right to exist, but demanded that the U.S. government live up to its professed democratic ideals and respect international human rights law - thus forming "a more perfect union."

People who sign this pledge may well hold a variety of ideas about the best future Israeli and Palestinian governmental arrangements, including a two-state solution, two confederated states, or even a single democratic state with equal rights for all. The pledge does not prejudge the best long-term political arrangement, but is instead focused on ending Western government and corporate complicity with Israel's current practices of injustice and impunity. This is the first step in opening up the possibility of a future of peace, justice, and equality for everyone living in



Palestine/Israel. This is true no matter what long-term governmental arrangements are ultimately chosen in the future.

**How relevant is taking the Apartheid-Free Pledge when Israel is now being charged with genocide?**

Pledging to help end Israeli apartheid, settler colonialism, and military occupation addresses the root causes of what many see as Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza (as well as the war crimes of the military wing of Hamas on October 7, 2023). While there is an immediate and pressing need to save lives, push for a ceasefire, and put an end to further offensive arms sales to Israel, addressing the structural injustices that brought us to this point is essential. The goal of our peace and justice work is not to return to the oppressive, but somewhat less violent, status quo of October 6. The goal is to get at the root causes of the massive violence that has been unleashed in the region since October 7 and find a long-term political settlement that secures peace, justice, and equality for everyone in Palestine/Israel.

**I would word the pledge differently if I were writing it.**

We encourage Quaker congregations and Friends organizations to sign the pledge as it stands, so they can join the larger Apartheid-Free Communities coalition, which has already agreed to this specific language. At the same time, we encourage Quaker groups to write their own statements about why they are signing the pledge that provides any interpretation, clarification or additions they would like to include.

**Shouldn't we be focusing on our own communities and domestic issues?**

The United States and other Western governments provide massive political, military, and financial support to Israel's policies of military occupation, apartheid, settler colonialism, and war crimes. We therefore have a moral responsibility to end our governments' complicity, as well as challenge those corporations that are directly complicit and profiting off these unjust policies. Let's face it, justice is indivisible. In the immortal words of Martin Luther King, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Joining those working to end injustice in



Palestine/Israel contributes to the work of ending injustice everywhere—including in our local and national communities.

In addition, the largest domestic “pro-Israel” lobbying groups pushing these unjust policies are Christian Zionists—who support the oppression of Palestinians now and hold an ultimately antisemitic theology that welcome the destruction of Jews in the “End Times.” Millions of the members of groups like Christians United for Israel are also White Christian Nationalists who support militarism, authoritarianism, domestic racism, homophobia, neglect of the poor, anti-immigrant hysteria, and limiting women’s rights. Foreign and domestic policies are deeply intertwined and we should faithfully address both—and work for peace, justice, and equality locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

**Our congregation is focusing on anti-racism work and that takes all our energy.**

Working to end apartheid is anti-racism work. If your congregation is committed to challenging racial injustice, this is a powerful way to add a global element to your work and connect the dots between anti-racism work in your country and internationally. Further there are direct connections between racial injustice in Israel and countries like the United States. Both countries were established as settler-colonial states, have historically engaged in genocidal practices against indigenous peoples, constructed apartheid regimes that legalize ethnic domination and supremacy, and continue to militarize policing to control historically marginalized people. In many ways, the U.S. and other countries’ support of Israel is a continuation of their own racist practices.

**Quakers don’t make pledges.**

We have heard this a few times, but it is just not accurate. Historically, Quakers have refused to swear oaths in court because Jesus said, “Do not swear oaths” and doing so implies that Friends would not tell the truth unless they swear an oath before a judge. A pledge, however, is not swearing an oath. It is simply an affirmation of individual or collective intent, like a business meeting minute. In the case of the Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge it is simply an affirmation to work with others to support peace, justice, and equality for all and withdrawn our passive or active support for the Western-backed Israeli policies of apartheid, military occupation, and settler colonialism that have violated the freedom and human rights of Palestinians for decades.

**Not everyone in our congregation will be on board with this.**



The work of discernment does not usually begin in unity. Quakers have often disagreed with each other at the beginning of their discernment process on many important issues of public policy and morality. Yet, just think of all the ways your congregation has already come to unity over time and taken prophetic stands on wide variety of peace and justice issues. It likely took time, deep listening and dialogue, prayer, mutual education, one-on-one meetings, and rigorous moral reflection.

Facilitating greater collective unity and faithfulness on the Pledge is challenging, but possible. We have already seen many initially conflicted Quaker congregations and organizations move from disunity to unity about signing on to the Apartheid-Free Pledge and you won't know until you try. Sometimes committees of Quaker congregations or organizations have even adopted the Pledge before the whole congregation ultimately agrees to it. The Quaker Affinity Group of the Apartheid-Free Communities coalition can help you 1) start the process of discernment, 2) educate your community, and 3) encourage them to take more and more meaningful action to end our complicity with Israeli apartheid, military occupation, settler colonialism, and war crimes?

**A final thought:**

This work isn't easy. But it is the work that the Religious Society of Friends is called to – to stand with the oppressed, to help bring release to the captives, to open the eyes of the blind, and to engage in the prophetic work of liberation through nonviolent action and peacebuilding.

TO CONTACT THE APARTHEID-FREE COMMUNITIES'  
QUAKER AFFINITY GROUP, GO TO [APARTHEID-FREE.ORG/QUAKERS](http://APARTHEID-FREE.ORG/QUAKERS)