

The Struggle for Unity on Israel/Palestine

One Quaker Meeting's Discernment Journey to Join the Apartheid-Free Communities Coalition

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Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

-- Romans 12:2

Today's Religious Society of Friends draws inspiration from the fact that our Quaker ancestors opposed the oppressive institution of slavery well before other Christian denominations in the American colonies. We are also inspired by the fact that many of our spiritual ancestors became organizers and activists in the movement to abolish slavery in the newly formed United States. This history reminds us that, at our most faithful, the Quaker way respects "that of God" in everyone and works tirelessly to promote peace, justice, and equality for all—even when the "powers and principalities" and the wider culture embrace discrimination, violence, and oppression.

Yet, we have not always been faithful to this prophetic calling. As noted by Quaker historians Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel in their book *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, it took Quakers in the American colonies over a hundred years of intense discernment dialog and contentious debate before they finally spoke in one voice against the sin of slavery. Even then, many Quakers in local meetings hesitated to participate in the movement to abolish slavery. Only ten percent of US Quakers boycotted slave-made plantation goods, and some of the most active Quaker abolitionists were marginalized, or even removed from membership, by their home meetings. For a long time, some Quaker meetings in the United States even refused to admit African Americans as members.

While discernment is central to Quaker spirituality, our internal struggle over slavery proves that it is not always easy. My question today is: Can we respond with more unity and faithfulness as we work for a just and lasting peace in Israel/Palestine? Our effort at discerning moral clarity on this issue may be as challenging as our ancestors faced when addressing slavery. There are many dominant and dissident perspectives on Israel/Palestine today and, in each camp, there are more reasonable and more extreme variations. This diversity of viewpoints makes collective discernment difficult and disunity and internal debate common. This is certainly true in the wider society.

On my bookshelf are a number of works that chronicle this long-standing debate within US society. These books range from general histories like *We Are Not One: A History of America's Fight Over Israel* to books about the conflicting perspectives among specific constituencies. These histories include *The Movement and the Middle East: How the Arab-Israeli Conflict Divided the American Left*, as well as *Black Power and Palestine*, which chronicles the intense debate about Israel/Palestine among African-American human rights leaders in the 1960s and 1970s. There are also books about the conflicting perspectives that have emerged within the US Jewish community, including *Our Palestinian Question: Israel and American Jewish Dissent, 1948-1978* and *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel*, which updates this long-standing debate among US Jews into the 21st century.

Quaker Unity and Disunity on Israel/Palestine

For decades, several Quakers around the world have focused on navigating these debates and discerning a moral and faithful way forward in addressing the peace, justice, and equality challenges within Israel/Palestine. The unprecedented scale of mass violence that has erupted in Israel/Palestine since October 7, 2023, has sparked an even wider soul searching among Friends. A business meeting minute from Salem Friends Meeting is representative: “At Salem Friends Meeting, we hold a variety of views and opinions on the current siege on Gaza, but as Quakers we are called to make a statement.... This conflict is not something which we can wait to address; this is a present and dire moment that requires response.”

Despite the “variety of views and opinions” mentioned in the Salem minute, a growing unity among Friends is beginning to emerge. In April 2024, eight major Quaker organizations found common ground and issued a joint statement entitled “[A Different Future Is Possible: A Shared Quaker Vision for Peace in Palestine and Israel.](#)” The co-signers of this statement included the American Friends Service Committee, Canadian Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Quakers in Britain, Quaker Council on European Affairs, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, and the Quaker United Nations Office.

Echoing allies in Jewish peace and justice groups including If Not Now, Rabbis for Ceasefire, and Jewish Voice for Peace, this joint Quaker statement called for a permanent ceasefire, the mutual release of captives, restoration of humanitarian aid to Gaza, accountability for all war crimes committed by Hamas and Israel, and the creation of a just and lasting political settlement. Besides addressing the military wing of Hamas, Israel, and third-party governments, the joint statement called on Quakers and other people of goodwill to:

1. *Urgently call and fervently work for a permanent ceasefire and amplify our voices in our communities and at the local, state, and national levels.*
2. *Encourage decision-makers calling for a ceasefire and working for peace.*
3. *Organize and participate in teach-ins, actions, and protests until a ceasefire and a just and lasting peace are realized.*

4. *Actively support an end to Israel's occupation and equal protection and rights for all people living under Israeli control and commit to actions as meetings/churches until this reality is realized.*
5. *Divest from corporations profiting from militarism, including the occupation of Palestine.*
6. *Support those in Israel and Palestine who are working for peace.*

In July 2025, many of these same global Quaker organizations collaborated again and issued an even stronger joint statement entitled [Quakers Discern Genocide Is Occurring in Gaza and Urge Courageous Action](#). This statement calls on Friends everywhere to oppose the US-backed Israeli genocide that is devastating Gaza, as well as to stand against the long-standing US-backed system of Israeli apartheid against Palestinians, which is a root cause of the unprecedented scale of mass violence we have witnessed in Israel/Palestine for the last two years. These Friends organizations assert that the moral challenge is not to choose sides between the military wing of Hamas and the current governing coalition of Israel, but to work for peace, justice, and equality for everyone living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

A significant number of Quaker monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings have also endorsed these joint statements, or something like them. Many have also taken bold action as part of the growing interfaith campaign for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. Quaker congregations have also joined the [Apartheid-Free Communities](#) coalition, which was convened by the American Friends Service Committee back in 2022 and now includes over 800 different faith communities, businesses, towns, and human rights/solidarity groups in the United States and around the world.

At the grassroots level, though, there still exists some countervailing patterns of hesitation and resistance to the core elements of these joint Quaker statements, or to Quaker congregations joining the Apartheid-Free Communities coalition. This was certainly true at Friends Meeting of Washington, where I am a member. Back in December 2023, after several emotionally-charged meetings, we were not even able to come to unity on a proposal by our Peace and Social Concerns Committee to hang a banner on our fence that read:

Seek Peace and pursue it. -- Psalm 34:14

**NEVER AGAIN, FOR ANYONE.
CEASEFIRE NOW!**

quakersdc.org

A few members and attenders called those of us serving on FMW's Peace and Social Concerns Committee " Hamas supporters " and " antisemites " because of our proposed banner. Another said the phrase " never again " should only be applied to Jews, not to other people. Tensions and frustration were very high, and some of us on the Committee despaired of ever finding a unified and faithful way forward as a spiritual community committed to peace, justice, and equality for all. We were even tempted to stop bringing up the issue because it was so divisive. Some of us considered leaving the Meeting because of what we felt was our spiritual community's lack of faithfulness to Friends testimonies and the Quaker legacy of prophetic, faith-based activism. But, the members of our Committee, and several other concerned FMW members and attenders, ultimately rejected all these temptations.

I rejected them because, while I had found the angry name calling and refusal to abide by the Quaker peace testimony a bit shocking, I recognized where it came from. Many people, including Friends, hold a fully justified concern for Jewish safety and rights in light of centuries of anti-Jewish discrimination culminating in the Nazi Holocaust. Yet, many of these same Friends also have an unjustifiable lack of empathy for the humanity, rights, and safety of Palestinians. This one-sided outlook is familiar to me. From my teen years to my late 20s, I shared this perspective and believed that the Palestinian people did not have any legitimate grievances against the State of Israel, that Palestinians were only motivated by unprovoked hate and anti-Jewish bigotry, and that those who criticized Israel's policies towards the Palestinians were either " antisemites " or " self-hating Jews ."

In this, I was following the lead of my beloved Quaker activist icon Bayard Rustin, who fought so hard for freedom and equality for everyone in the United States, but shared my unwitting anti-Palestinian racism. Before his death in 1987, Rustin regularly denounced the views of those who claimed that the State of Israel was in any way " racist, fascist, imperialistic, and the like ." He specifically rejected making any connection between Israeli policies and the South African system of apartheid, a connection now widely acknowledged by international human rights organizations.

Rustin even placed a full-page ad in the Sunday editions of both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* on June 28, 1970, urging the Nixon administration to increase its military aid to Israel. He did not view the State of Israel as an oppressor of the Palestinian people. In fact, he saw Arabs, including the Palestinians, as culturally backward, violent, antisemitic, would-be oppressors of Israel and the Jewish people. Rustin saw his biased view as fully consistent with his " historic and deep sense of solidarity with the Jewish people ." While many US Quakers were shocked by Rustin's call for vastly increasing US military aid, many still shared his stereotypical outlook toward Palestinians. I know I did.

My own experience, however, teaches me that people can renew their minds and grow in spiritual discernment. They can question their starting assumptions, pray for divine wisdom, listen more carefully to marginalized voices, and deepen their empathy for people they hold unconscious biases against. They can also engage in more rigorous scriptural interpretation and deeper moral reasoning, as well as undertake a more critical study of the history and current

conditions in Israel/Palestine. All of this can help Friends discern more clearly what the prophetic gospel of peace, justice, and equality demands in this dire situation now.

I shared my personal discernment journey in the 2017 Pendle Hill pamphlet *Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions? A Quaker Zionist Rethinks Palestinian Rights*. As the months unfolded after the shock of October 7th, 2023, I began to see a similar discernment journey happening within my Meeting. After apologies for harsh words, a recommitment to respectful dialog, and months of mutual learning initiated by our Peace and Social Concerns Committee, we were able to find our way to meaningful unity on Israel/Palestine.

From the 2024 Joint Quaker Statement to the Apartheid-Free Pledge

At FMW's July 2024 business meeting, our Meeting formally endorsed the joint Quaker statement "A Different Future Is Possible." Building on this growing unity from a starting place of name calling, disunity, and confusion, FMW's Peace and Social Concerns Committee decided to ask our Meeting to take the additional step of joining the [Apartheid-Free Communities](#) coalition by endorsing its membership Pledge, which reads:

WE AFFIRM our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people and all people;

WE OPPOSE all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression; and

WE DECLARE ourselves an Apartheid-free community and to that end,

WE PLEDGE to join others in working to end all support to Israel's Apartheid regime, settler colonialism, and military occupation.

We sent out our four-page proposal two weeks before the September 2024 business meeting. It included: 1) the Pledge, 2) a background section that explained its moral consistency with longstanding Quaker testimonies of peace, justice, and equality for all; and 3) a list of the diverse Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu organizations that had already signed the Pledge, including several Quaker congregations and organizations. At FMW's September business meeting, we chose not to ask for a decision by the Meeting. We asked instead to hear any questions or concerns that Friends had about the Pledge. We explained that we would only seek a formal decision after a month or two of deep discernment and dialog among the members and attenders of our large Quaker community. We also explained that we would organize several opportunities for deeper listening and learning in the coming month.

The Committee decided on this approach because we knew that endorsing the Pledge had proven more difficult for some Quaker meetings than endorsing the statement "A Different Future Is Possible." This is due to a subtle, but still important, difference between the two statements. While the 2024 joint Quaker statement acknowledges that "a growing number of international human rights organizations have documented that Israel's treatment of

Palestinians meets the legal definition of apartheid,” it does not directly assert that Israel’s military occupation of Palestine has become a system of apartheid. The Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge does, which some Friends feel is a step too far.

The sticking point for several people at the October 2024 business meeting was not about the first three lines of the Pledge. Nor did Friends object to the goal of ending Israel’s military occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem in the fourth line. There were concerns, however, about naming this policy “apartheid.” As one person asked in the business meeting, “Doesn’t ‘apartheid’ just refer to the white supremacist regime that ruled South Africa? If so, how can the State of Israel be described as an apartheid regime?” Learning that this was the starting assumption for some FMW members was very helpful as we prepared to address their concerns.

Over the next month, FMW’s Peace and Social Concerns Committee responded to this question in two different ways. First, we acknowledged that the word “apartheid” was coined by the racist minority regime in South Africa, but explained that the term has since been given a wider meaning, including under international law. It was first codified as a crime against humanity in the 1977 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, and then strengthened in the 1998 Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court.

Second, the Committee noted that while there were some differences between the South African system and other apartheid regimes around the world, all of them share the three defining characteristics of apartheid under international law:

1. An intent to maintain domination by one group over another.
2. A context of systematic oppression by one group over another.
3. Inhuman acts by the dominant group against the other.

These conversations broadened our community’s understanding of the crime of apartheid, but some Friends still remained uncertain that these three characteristics were descriptive of Israel’s treatment of the 7.5 million Palestinians now living under its control in Israel/Palestine.

Our Committee addressed this concern as well. We pointed out that when South African anti-apartheid activists Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela visited Israel/Palestine on fact-finding missions, they both reported that Israel’s apartheid regime was far more oppressive than the apartheid system in South Africa. We also asked members of the Meeting who had worked in Israel/Palestine, or taken part in fact-finding delegations there, to speak to hesitant Friends and share their direct observations of the apartheid policies in play in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. To provide even more systematic evidence of the oppressive apartheid policies adopted by the State of Israel, our Committee also shared links to the recent research reports on Israeli apartheid by [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), the Israeli human rights group [B’Tselem](#), and the Palestinian human rights group [Al Haq](#). We also shared the advisory finding of the [International Criminal Court](#), which ruled in July 2024 that the decades-

long Israeli military occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem was illegal under international law and constituted the crime of apartheid.

This information proved persuasive. Heading into FMW's October business meeting, I sensed a growing agreement among FMW members and attenders that the State of Israel—with the financial, military, and diplomatic support of the United States and other Western governments—had constructed a complex apartheid regime over the Palestinians living in Israel/Palestine. There was also clarity that faithfulness to our Quaker testimonies on peace, justice, and equality included joining an interfaith coalition seeking to change this oppressive status quo, particularly since our government and US-based corporations have been Israel's chief enablers.

The only remaining hesitation about the Apartheid-Free Pledge was voiced by an FMW Friend in September's business meeting. He shared his concern about the term "settler colonialism" in the Pledge. This Friend questioned whether it was accurate to use the term settler-colonialism to describe Israeli policy. While he acknowledged that the term is accurate to describe US policies towards this continent's indigenous peoples, he asked, is it fair to call it settler-colonialism when a historically persecuted people seeks safety by moving its most threatened members to a part of the world that their ancient spiritual ancestors had once called home?

Is Settler-Colonialism a Feature of Israeli Apartheid?

This question has been a stumbling block for coming to agreement on the Apartheid-Free Pledge in more than a few Quaker meetings, and it deserves careful consideration and deliberation by Quakers everywhere. Several Friends I know have said to me that they agree that the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live under an apartheid regime enforced by a permanent military occupation. They even agree that "settler-colonialism" is a fair description of the unrelenting expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 1967, which is violently enforced by both armed settlers and IDF soldiers. Yet, many of these same Friends are still hesitant to use the term "settler colonialism" in relation to Israel because it might imply that there was something unjust and colonial about the early Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

In our dialogues with our Meeting's members and attenders, FMW's Peace and Social Concerns Committee members stressed one key point—that there is little to no doubt that Israel began implementing a settler-colonial policy on the remaining 22 percent of historic Palestine that it militarily occupied in 1967. To make this point more vivid, we shared with Friends the words of Israel's Minister of Defense speaking to the newly conquered Palestinians. In that speech, Moshe Dayan told the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories, "We have no solution, you shall continue to live like dogs, and whoever wishes may leave, and we will see where this process leads."

The process led almost immediately to settler-colonialism. While government lawyers explained to Israeli policymakers that it was against international law, and while many Israelis

opposed illegal settlements in the newly Occupied Palestinian Territories, the government decided to begin transferring a growing number of Jewish Israeli citizens into Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The goal, still contested by some Jewish Israelis and many Jews around the world, was to build up an ever-expanding network of segregated Jewish Israeli colonies that dispossessed the Palestinians of ever-increasing amounts of their land and resources.

During a June 2023 fact-finding delegation to the West Bank and East Jerusalem organized by Friends United Meeting, I saw the fruits of this almost six-decades-old policy first hand. On that trip, co-led by North Carolina Quakers Max and Jane Carter, we saw many examples of land and water theft, home demolitions, armed checkpoints and restrictions on Palestinian travel. We also saw evidence of Israelis burning Palestinian crops and shooting at Palestinian farmers, as well as settler and soldier attacks against hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages. We talked with Palestinians about their experiences of mass incarceration, which each year includes hundreds of Palestinian children who are often held in administrative detention without any charges made against them. We saw, again and again, the impacts of segregated roads, segregated Israeli colonies, segregated legal systems, and the increasing annexation of Palestinian land. My main message to hesitant Friends is that all of this is more than enough to accurately describe Israel's 58-year-old policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as both "apartheid" *and* "settler-colonialism."

This pattern of oppressive behavior is a fact no matter what people think about the early Zionist movement or the founding of the State of Israel. The post-1967 settler policy clearly violates international law, as well as the core conviction of the Apartheid-Free Communities coalition, whose primary slogan is:

**ALL PEOPLE ARE
EQUAL AND SHOULD
BE TREATED WITH
DIGNITY AND RESPECT**



[APARTHEID-FREE.ORG](https://www.apartheid-free.org)



That said, there is still value in asking the question: Does the settler colonial policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 1967 have any roots or precedents within the early Zionist movement or the State of Israel's policies before then? The amount of historical research on this question is actually enormous, and it is both relevant and daunting to sift

through. This has been part of the discernment dialog that FMW's Peace and Social Concerns Committee has promoted within our Meeting for years through book talks, panels, and film showings. In my conversations with Friends at FMW and elsewhere, I have also shared what I have learned, particularly focusing on the views of three early Zionist leaders who illustrate the deeper historical roots of Israeli settler colonialism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories today.

The first leader is Theodore Herzl, the Jewish intellectual who lived in Vienna and is widely viewed as the founder of the "Political Zionist" movement. He earned this reputation by writing the movement's 1896 manifesto, *The Jewish State*, and organizing the first World Zionist Congress in 1897. The Congress was attended by over 250 Jewish ethno-nationalists from 15 different countries and addressed an issue of great concern to the vast majority of European Jews--the very real problem of anti-Jewish bigotry, which in the late 1800s included legal and social discrimination in Western Europe and violent pogroms against Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Herzl's and their proposed solution was for millions of European Jews to organize themselves to gain Great Power support for them leaving Europe *en masse* and creating a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. This was an audacious vision at the time, given that the Jewish population of Palestine only made up about three percent of the Palestinian people.

The biggest challenge facing this tiny group of Zionists was that the vast majority of Jews in Europe and the United States opposed their proposed solution to antisemitism. Most Jews saw it as a foolish pipedream and many deemed it blasphemous and/or unjust. A big part of the organized Jewish push-back against the Zionist movement was because it was, in Herzl's own words, "somewhat colonial." Even before publishing his manifesto, Herzl admitted in his diary that Zionist Jews would need to displace and dispossess most of the Palestinians to create his envisioned "Jewish State." The corporate charter that Herzl co-wrote for the new movement's Jewish-Ottoman Land Company also explicitly included the goal of displacing Palestinians to "other provinces and territories of the Ottoman Empire."

To be fair, Herzl was not a violent man. He believed that the Zionist objective of creating an ethno-nationalist Jewish State in Palestine could be achieved through the support of the British Empire, persuading more European Jews to join the movement's Palestine Jewish Colonial Association, and providing financial incentives to "the indigenous population" to leave Palestine. Other Zionist leaders took a different view and were much more militaristic in their outlook regarding what would be required to fulfil the Zionist dream of turning Palestine into a Jewish State.

A good example is Russian Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who in 1925 proclaimed that, "Zionism is a colonizing venture and, therefore, it stands or falls on the question of armed force." As Jabotinsky explained:

Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonized. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of

hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of “Palestine” into the “Land of Israel.”

While Jabotinsky was on the extreme right-wing of the Zionist movement, his settler-colonial outlook was widely-shared by most centrist and left-leaning Zionists.

This latter group included David Ben-Gurion, who became the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel. In internal discussions with other Zionist leaders in Palestine during the 1930s, Ben-Gurion offered grudging respect toward the organized Palestinian resistance to the Zionist project by saying he would join them if he were a Palestinian. As he noted, “Let us not ignore the truth among ourselves... politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves.” Like Jabotinsky, Ben-Gurion also believed that a violent ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people was necessary to create a Jewish State, whose population he believed would have to be at least eighty percent Jewish to be viable. In 1937, he wrote a letter to his son, saying “the Arabs will have to go, but one needs an opportune moment for making it happen, such as a war.”

Jabotinsky’s and Ben-Gurion’s hoped-for war was launched by armed Zionist militias ten years later and it soon escalated into a wider regional war through 1948. The Zionists called it the War of Independence, but the Palestinians called it the Nakba, which is Arabic for catastrophe. While the founding of the State of Israel benefited the Jewish immigrants to Palestine before, during, and after the Nazi years, it was certainly a catastrophe for Palestinians, who ended up paying the price for Europe’s crimes and for the US, Canadian, and British refusal to allow mass immigration of Nazi-persecuted Jews into their own countries. The impact was staggering. Fifteen thousand Palestinians were killed during the Nakba of 1948, over 500 Palestinian villages and towns were wiped off the map, and three quarters of the Palestinian population of what became the State of Israel was expelled to the remaining 22 percent of historic Palestine and to refugee camps in surrounding countries.

After the newly declared State of Israel won the war in 1948, it refused to allow the 750,000 displaced Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, farms, and businesses in what was now the State of Israel. This policy of ethnic cleansing was maintained by Israel even though the Palestinians’ right of return was guaranteed under international law, specifically affirmed by UN resolution 194 and, later, by resolution 3236. The small minority of Palestinians remaining in what became the State of Israel were also placed under military rule and were not allowed to become voting citizens in Israel until 1966. Even then, they faced severe legal restrictions that made them second class citizens. Many of these restrictions persist, or have even worsened, to this day.

The post-1967 Israeli policy of settler-colonialism in the Occupied Territories did not appear out of thin air. It has historical roots that go back as far as the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While we cannot change what happened in past centuries, citizens of Western governments—especially in the United States—have a moral responsibility to end our economic, political, and military complicity with Israeli apartheid and to work for a future where all the people living “between the River and the Sea” enjoy security, equality, human rights, and self-

determination going forward. As a Palestinian village priest in the West Bank explained to my 2023 Quaker delegation, “It does not matter if your name is Moshe, Mohammad, or Mathew, all are precious in the sight of God.” At Friends Meeting of Washington’s October 2024 business meeting, our Peace and Social Concerns Committee argued that this core conviction of our faith is why our Meeting should endorse the Pledge and become active in the Apartheid-Free Communities coalition.

FMW’s Decision and Our Next Steps

After I stood to reintroduce the Peace and Social Concerns Committee’s proposal in October 2024, I sat down half expecting a long and contentious discussion about settler-colonialism, but it did not happen. After several heartfelt comments and reflections, FMW’s business meeting came to a clear decision on endorsing the Pledge *and* becoming an active member of the Apartheid-Free Communities coalition. Our Meeting discerned that the Pledge was not a step too far, but the next needed step in our Meeting’s prophetic witness promoting peace, justice, and equality for all in Israel/Palestine, and everywhere.

The challenge for us now is to turn the commitments in the Pledge into meaningful action. To start this process, our Peace and Social Concerns Committee shared with our Meeting the welcome letter from the lead organizer of the Apartheid-Free Communities coalition, which included a [link to the coalition’s webpage](#) suggesting the types of actions that faith-based Apartheid-Free Communities could take. The Committee also regularly shares the monthly Apartheid-Free Communities newsletter and its many specific and timely action opportunities.

To date, FMW Friends have lobbied with the Friends Committee on National Legislation for ceasefire resolutions, an arms embargo on illegal US weapons transfers to Israel, and the restoration of US funding to UNRWA. FMW members and attenders have also taken part in weekly AFSC Action Hours on Palestine. We have participated in numerous nonviolent vigils, marches, and demonstrations in DC, often carrying the Peace and Social Concern Committee’s banner, or wearing “End Israeli Apartheid” T-shirts. We had our Trustees Committee screen our investments in order to divest from any companies listed on the AFSC’s Divest for Palestinian Rights webpage. We also formed the sixth most successful fundraising team for the massive 2025 UNRWA-USA DC Gaza 5K Walk, and we have provided rent-free space at our Meetinghouse for events, respite, and meetings by Palestine Legal, Jewish Voice for Peace, and Christians for Ceasefire and Just Peace. In addition, we have organized and participated in several internal and public education events.

Moving beyond the DC, Virginia, and Maryland areas where FMW Friends live, we have worked to build the larger Apartheid-Free Communities coalition. We donated Meeting funds to support the coalition. We sent two representatives to the first in-person national interfaith conference of the coalition at Philadelphia’s Friends Center in December 2024, and we have recruited Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Peace and Social Concern Committee, as well as BYM’s

Palestinian Israel Peace and Justice Working Group, to endorse the Pledge and join the Apartheid-Free Communities network.

We have also collaborated with representatives from the over 50 local Quaker congregations, yearly meetings, and Friends organizations in North America that have already signed on to the Apartheid-Free Pledge. Together, we created a [Quaker Affinity Group](#) within the wider Apartheid-Free coalition. This Affinity Group works to:

- Encourage and support more Quaker congregations and organizations to sign on to the Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge and join the growing anti-apartheid movement;
- Foster active collaboration and the sharing of educational resources and action ideas among representatives from the various Apartheid-Free Quaker communities; and
- Promote affinity group members working in coalition with the wider Apartheid-Free Communities coalition locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

We are now working together to provide inspiration, speakers, workshops, resources, monthly organizer calls, and collaborative action opportunities for Apartheid-Free Quaker congregations and groups around the world.

Conclusion

Friends Meeting of Washington knows that the immediate task ahead is ending corporate and Western government complicity with Israel's genocidal assault on the people of Gaza, and its increasing violence in the West Bank. We also know that there will not be a sustainable or just peace without ending Israeli apartheid. We are therefore prepared to take up the long-term ministry of working to build a strong international, nonviolent, anti-apartheid movement in solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli activists. This will require us to engage in peace and justice advocacy, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding efforts, and strategic nonviolent resistance—the four cornerstones of Quaker faith-based activism.

As the new Outreach Coordinator of the Quaker Affinity Group, I often hear from people in the wider Quaker world who believe their congregations are just too divided, too ill-informed, or too apathetic to come to unity on Israel/Palestine. My response is that the experience of Friends Meeting of Washington proves that Quaker meetings can engage in deep discernment and move from fractured disunity and inaction to unity and powerful faith-based activism for peace, justice, and equality for all in Israel/Palestine.

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