

Principles for a Just and Lasting Peace Between Palestinians and Israelis

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Because of the many political, economic, and social changes that have taken place since these principles were first affirmed in 1999, the AFSC has felt the need to update and reaffirm its policy regarding the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe that an articulated position based upon historic AFSC principles might offer some ways to reshape the peace discourse and allow it to move forward.

From its beginnings in 1917, the American Friends Service Committee has sought to repair the destruction caused by war and violence by relieving and healing its victims. AFSC has sought to respond to suffering whether it is caused by direct human actions or by oppressive structures that human beings have created. When peace building through humanitarian aid has led AFSC to enter the political arena, AFSC, in its support for peacemaking, has sought reconciliation between antagonists, endeavoring to help create the conditions of genuine peace that are based upon the preservation of basic human rights and the restoration of justice. In its role as peacemaker as well as peace builder, AFSC has operated from a nonviolent ethic of care that acknowledges and embraces the humanity on all sides of those in conflict.

AFSC has approached its work from a spirit of love, but an equally strong motivation for its work has been its commitment to truth. Indeed, only after there is truth can we begin the task of serving justice as well as love. Only after parties in conflict can believe in the possibilities of justice can there be hope for reconciliation. AFSC believes that in speaking truth, in struggling for justice, and in exhibiting compassion, the organization may help reshape the ways human beings speak about and think about peace and how they act upon those words and thoughts.

AFSC's long experience in the Middle East, reaching back to the end of World War II, convinces us that looking at issues of war and peace from an ethical and religious perspective can be useful and timely. AFSC believes that focusing on

the precious humanity of those in conflict with one another will open new ways for considering how peace might be achieved and sustained. The Middle East policy of the United States and most of the rest of the Western world, as well as the policy of the Israelis and Palestinians, has for too long accepted the myth that only violence and the threat of violence can produce stability and create peace. The reality is that violence has not brought peace, and the threat of violence has only exacerbated the conflicts.

By definition, the peace for which AFSC is working will be not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice – justice between nations, and within nations as well. Because we are worried that not all involved parties are on the road to a peace sustained by justice, we welcome this opportunity to explain our position on some of the most contentious elements in this conflict, including some that have not been addressed at all in the aftermath of Oslo. As we state our position, we hope to make clear that it is informed by a concern for truth and justice, and is shaped by compassion and care.

Components of a Just Peace

1. Self-determination

Self-determination has been a leading principle in the breakup of colonial empires and in the creation of independent states in the Twentieth Century. The truth is that Israelis have already exercised their right to national self-determination and now have their own state. The Palestinians continue to be denied that right. In accordance with its ethical and religious beliefs and with international law, AFSC has consistently upheld peoples' rights to self-determination. Specifically, AFSC affirms the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to live as sovereign peoples in their own homeland, a right that encompasses the possibility of choosing two separate states. We acknowledge that other options such as a bi-national state and confederation are being discussed.

Ultimately it will be up to both parties to determine national boundaries, but AFSC believes that discussion should be guided by international law and United Nations resolutions 242 and 338. Since the issue here is of one land and two peoples, no one's right to self-determination should be exercised at the expense of someone else's and the human rights of minorities in Israel and any future Palestinian state must always be respected and protected. Securing both peoples' right to self determination necessarily means ending Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories and must address, in a timely way, refugees' right of

return in a manner that results in a just and mutually agreed upon resolution of the refugee issue. Any settlement of boundaries must be based upon respect for the rule of law and for the right of both peoples to determine their own future. Both parties should be guided by an ethic of reciprocity: what holds true for one side in a conflict should hold true for the other as well. This ethic will help address the very real power imbalance that currently exists between Israelis and Palestinians, an imbalance that works against mutually acceptable and just agreements.

2. Rights

The same principles of reciprocity present in self-determination must also extend to the discussion of human rights, civil and political as well as economic, social, and cultural, which provide the foundation to any building of peace. Human rights include the freedom to practice one's religion, the freedom of assembly, free speech, free press, the right to education and adequate nutrition, the right to adequate shelter, the right to an adequate standard of living, and civil rights for all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, political orientation, nationality, or ethnicity. Other important rights include the right to legal representation, a fair trial, and protection against discrimination in employment, housing, education, and health care. AFSC also affirms the right to freedom of movement within borders and freedom from collective punishment, because these rights often have been denied. Rights of minorities within the Israeli state and within a future Palestinian state must also be safeguarded. These rights ought to be secured not only at the end of the peace process, but also to inform the process itself. AFSC has long contended that means determine ends. Therefore just ends can be accomplished only through just means.

3. Economic Justice and Natural Resources

All parties need to take action to ensure equitable access to resources such as land and water. Fair taxation and distribution of resources are critical elements to establish and maintain peace, not only between Israelis and Palestinians, but also within each separate society. It is important that people, goods, and services be able to move freely in the region. People should have the right to build and live anywhere, but not as a result of unwarranted land confiscation and illegal settlements. Mobility for trade, employment, education, and residence is critical to establishing and sustaining peace. These issues can be addressed before, during, and after any political solution to the conflict.

4. Governance

AFSC supports the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to choose their forms of governance. We affirm our support for a democratic process that is accountable to all its people as the surest means of achieving sustainable and just political structures.

5. Security

The foundations of security are to be found in trust, respect, and mutual recognition of the humanity and past and present sufferings of both parties. Security is contingent upon the achievement of self-determination and the promotion and protection of basic human rights. Such security does not currently exist. AFSC maintains that military might only increases fear and distrust and exacerbates the power differences that already exist between conflicting parties. It cannot achieve and guarantee security. The availability of arms also contributes to the prevalence of violence, leading to a situation where the threat or use of violence is often the first option used to settle personal, communal, or national disputes. Consequently, AFSC supports disarmament processes and the cessation of military sales and assistance to all parties.

6. Settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Wall

Since the 1967 war, unilateral Israeli settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories has been one of the greatest obstacles to the peace process. The building of settlements in the occupied territories, including in the city of Jerusalem, violates Israel's obligations as an occupying power under the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Equally, the building of a separation wall in the West Bank and Jerusalem has resulted in the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian land and property, has divided communities and separated families, and has altered reality on the ground in ways that will make peace more difficult to realize. In 2004 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the building of a wall on West Bank land including in East Jerusalem is illegal. In keeping with the ICJ ruling AFSC believes that construction of the wall should be halted, sections already completed should be dismantled, legislation and regulatory acts related to the wall should be canceled, and reparations should be made for all damages caused by the wall. Compensation or restitution to those who have lost their homes and lands by illegal means are topics that also must be and have not yet been addressed.

7. The Status of Jerusalem

In accordance with international law, AFSC recognizes East Jerusalem as occupied territory and Israel as the responsible occupying power. Consistent

with AFSC's belief that Israel and Palestine is a home for two peoples, Jerusalem must be regarded as a city that can be united but also can be shared by both peoples. Since the status of Jerusalem continues to be a very great obstacle to peace at the present time, AFSC believes that the conflict should be resolved by all parties, rather than unilaterally as Israel has done with its settlement policy. AFSC also affirms its support for open access to the city for Palestinians, as well as Israelis, as a religious, political, socio-economic, and residential center, even before the final status of Jerusalem has been determined.

8. Responsibilities of the International Community

While it is absolutely vital that peace efforts in Israel and Palestine be shaped and led by the people in the region, AFSC recognizes that the international community also bears both legal and moral responsibility for helping to end the conflict. There is a marked power imbalance between Palestinians and Israelis. Therefore the international community must consistently and impartially enforce international agreements and laws. In the absence of this commitment, bilateral negotiations cannot be expected to produce just results. Effectively this means that countries within the United Nations have a responsibility to ensure that UN Resolutions are respected. The High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions have an obligation to ensure that humanitarian law is respected. All countries have an obligation to ensure that basic human rights are protected, that those responsible for abuses are held accountable, and that their own policies and actions do not either directly or indirectly support or sustain human rights violations. International civil society actors also have a responsibility to ensure that their actions and resources are used in ways that promote a just and lasting peace.

In working to resolve this conflict, AFSC believes that international actors must fulfill their obligations in line with the principles outlined above. This includes affirming the principles of self-determination in accordance with human rights and international law, respecting elected governments, opposing the imposition of unilateral changes such as to territorial boundaries and land ownership, and cutting military assistance to all parties. AFSC also holds that all non-military aid provided by the international community should be used to increase human security and should not be based on preconditions that run counter to local needs or that create aid dependence. The international community must ensure that its actions foster respect for rights, the rule of law, human dignity, and peace. As an organization based in the United States, AFSC takes particular

responsibility for addressing the US role in the region, specifically giving attention to policies and practices that impede progress towards peace.

Conclusion

The road to peace needs to be carefully re-constructed and followed. Violence and the threat of violence often appear to be short-cuts to reaching the goal. However, as A.J. Muste observed, they are short cuts that become blind alleys. The surest road to peace is the path of empathy, where self interest can give way to shared interest, where separateness can give way to reconciliation, where domination can give way to justice. Helping to build that road and joining with Israelis and Palestinians who choose to walk it, are tasks to which AFSC continues to dedicate itself.