

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends
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To: All BYM Local Worshipping Communities

RE: Three Peace and Social Concerns Minutes Coming to BYM 2026 Annual Session

Dear Friends -

Greetings from Baltimore Yearly Meeting. My name is Doug Vaughn, and I am the current Clerk of BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee. I am writing today to alert your local worshipping community to three items that will appear on the business agenda at BYM's 2026 Annual Session. BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee recommends the following Minutes and Actions be endorsed by Baltimore Yearly Meeting:

1. **Shepherdstown Harms Minute**

This Minute was authored by Shepherdstown Friends Meeting and has subsequently been endorsed by the following BYM Meetings: Hopewell-Centre, Annapolis, Stony Run, Patapsco, Bethesda, Patuxent, Frederick, Gunpowder, and Adelphi. The Minute articulates the concerns of Friends regarding the harms caused by our current government. A copy of that minute is attached and [available here](#).

2. **Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge**

The [Apartheid-Free network](#), a coalition of communities who pledge to work together to end Israeli apartheid is convened by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). This coalition, formed in 2022, following the emerging consensus among the international human rights community that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people amounts to the Crime of Apartheid includes now over 1200 congregations, faith communities, solidarity organizations, non-profits, campus groups and businesses. Some BYM Meetings, including Adelphi, Bethesda, Frederick, Annapolis, FMW, and State College have signed the Apartheid-Free Community [pledge](#) which is attached and [available here](#).

3. **Statement on genocide from the eight Quaker organizations**

In fall of 2025, "after long periods of discernment, eight Quaker groups signed a statement calling Israel's war in Gaza genocide. The statement calls for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and for Palestinians to have full access to humanitarian aid." [Read more in Friends Journal](#), also attached. The statement is attached and [available here](#).

We request that Monthly Meetings and other local worshipping communities consider all three items in your corporate discernment before Annual Session. To aid in your discernment, the BYM Peace and Social Concerns will be holding two information and listening sessions:

- Thursday, June 25 at 7:00 pm EST via Zoom at <https://afsc-org.zoom.us/j/84800022733?pwd=E7fbrwvZnSHnHtjclBbijsCVCQWUR.1> (this link is also available on the BYM webpage under "Events")
- In Person, Thursday, July 30 at 4:15pm at Annual Session during Interest Groups

In addition, you may contact the Committee at Peace@bym-rsf.org.

Sincerely,
Doug Vaughn
Stony Run Friends Meeting
Clerk, BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee
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Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia
www.bym-rsf.org

Shepherdstown Friends Meeting Minute on War in Iran

As members of the Quaker community in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, we are spiritual heirs to 375 years of testimony and action against all war and violence. We reaffirm the Quaker Peace Testimony of 1660 which states: “We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end and under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world.”

As Quakers, we believe in the sacred worth of all individuals. This belief underlies our Peace Testimony and leads us to acts of compassion and support for anyone who is suffering. A sustainable and workable peace requires understanding and addressing the root causes and differences that drive nations to war.

As a spiritual community, we call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and a commitment to diplomacy and peacebuilding. We join the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and other Quakers in urging the United States Government to pursue non-violent pathways to peace through diplomacy, international cooperation, and peacebuilding actions:

- **Immediate Ceasefire:**
Congress should prioritize an immediate and permanent ceasefire and reject billions in funding for war. Expanding military funding risks further civilian casualties and human suffering.
- **Humanitarian Concerns:**
We mourn the deaths of Iranian civilians and U.S. service members. We condemn the U.S. missile strike that reportedly killed over 100 girls at an Iranian school. We decry the destruction of schools, houses, power plants, bridges, and basic infrastructure, which violates both U.S. law and international law. We abhor genocidal threats “to wipe out a whole civilization.”
- **Congressional Action:**
Shepherdstown Friends Meeting opposes all war. We urge Congress to assert its constitutional authority to take action to ensure that no president can unilaterally lead the nation into war. Bypassing Congress in decisions on war and peace prevents the debate and the time needed to understand the root causes of conflicts and to find non-violent resolutions.
- **Diplomacy Must Be the Path Forward:**
Diplomacy, negotiations, and sustained international cooperation are the only viable path forward to military de-escalation, regional stability, and lasting peace.

Adopted by the Shepherdstown Friends Meeting, WV, May 10, 2026

<https://shepherdstownfriends.org/where-we-stand>

Click to go forward, hold to see history



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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.



Quaker Organizations Discern Genocide is Occurring in Gaza and Urge Courageous Action

"We are for justice and mercy and truth and peace and true freedom."

— Edward Burrough, 1659

As Quakers, we recognize the divine imprint in every human being and confess the equality of all to live safely and without fear.

We are also compelled as Quakers to speak truth with integrity, including where it is uncomfortable, yet always to do so in love. This requires us to speak against the catastrophic violence in Gaza.

Friends have a long history of working for peaceful coexistence and justice for all people in the Middle East. We have witnessed times when Jews, Muslims, and Christians have enjoyed peace and cooperation in the region. Since the creation of the state of Israel, our organizations have supported nonviolent efforts among both Palestinians and Israelis to protect human rights, prevent violence, address the root causes of conflict, and promote peacebuilding. We still believe a peaceful future for all peoples is possible.

However, through our decades of humanitarian work and accompaniment with Palestinian and Israeli communities we have witnessed the relentless erosion of justice. This lack of justice and the current violence is rooted in the systemic and violent dispossession of Palestinians from their lands and decades of occupation, apartheid policies, and the systematic denial of Palestinian rights.

This history contextualizes the atrocities that are being perpetrated against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank today by Israel's military and government – the starvation campaigns, mass killings, mass deportations, ethnic cleansing, settler violence, and calculated erasure of life. These are not isolated horrors, but the brutal continuation of a 76-year project of displacement and denial of Palestinians' human rights.

These decades of dispossession, oppression, occupation, and violence are the backdrop to the cycles of violence in the region including the attacks, killings, abductions, and trauma suffered by Israelis on October 7, 2023.

After deep communal and prayerful discernment, informed by our direct witness in Palestine/Israel and our readings of the positions of international human rights organizations, international and Israeli genocide scholars, and experts on the UN Genocide Convention (1948), [we are exercising our religious conviction to speak the truth as we see it. We believe with moral clarity, and in line with the definition of the crime of genocide, that the current actions in Gaza perpetrated by the Israeli government, constitute genocide.](#)

Our peace and equality testimonies are clear: Apparent security for some, bought with the insecurity of others, tears at our shared humanity and cannot bring peace. Peace built on systematic oppression is a lie. We name what we see as genocide after deep discernment – not to incite, but to open eyes, minds, and hearts. We name this painful truth with the fervent hope that the violence it describes will cease, and with continued commitment to help heal the wounds of war on all sides

Since the 7th of October 2023, we have witnessed the following realities:

- Approximately 1,200 Israelis killed, including over 800 civilians, 36 of them children, over 3,300 injured and 223 people abducted on October 7, 2023.
 - Over 57,000 Palestinians directly killed in Gaza, with estimates of the number of people killed as a result of both the direct and indirect impacts of war rising as high as 300,000.
- In Gaza, at least 17,000 children killed, more than 35,000 injured, over 50,000 children lost at least one of their parents. Between 3,000 and 4,000 children in Gaza have had one or more limbs amputated – the highest figure for child amputees globally.
- Nearly 10,000 Palestinians held in Israeli military detention, over 3,500 of them without any charge or trial, and in facilities where they are regularly subject to violence, sexual abuse, torture, and killing.
- Over 200 Palestinian journalists killed.
- Deliberate mass starvation through the systematic obstruction of food, water, and medicine. which has claimed many lives.
- The destruction over 70% of homes.
- Over 1,450 recorded attacks on health workers, patients, hospitals, and medical infrastructure with at least 1,500 health care workers killed and over 85% of hospitals bombed or besieged. Remaining facilities are systematically denied fuel and electricity – cutting power to incubators, dialysis machines, and operating theaters, directly causing preventable deaths.
- Forced displacement of 1.9 million people amid calls to erase Gaza and for the ethnic cleansing of the population.
- State-sanctioned dehumanization and incitement by officials with Palestinians called "human animals" and with politicians, media, and soldiers celebrating killings of civilians.

Article II of the UN Genocide Convention defines genocide as acts committed "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group". We believe the Israeli actions in Gaza meet this threshold.

We cry out equally for the [protection of free speech and the right to protest](#). The moral urgency of this moment demands space for dissent. Across the world, those calling for a free Palestine, an end to genocide, and compliance with international law face censorship, smear campaigns, and legislative criminalization and repression. This silencing – often falsely equating support for Palestinian rights and/or anti-Zionism with antisemitism – undermines integrity and is a betrayal of democracy and a tool of genocide denial. Quakers know well that speaking truth to power requires the freedom to dissent. This is reflected in the growing numbers of conscientious objectors who take the moral stand and refuse to participate in the atrocities through military service. We reaffirm our belief in the human dignity of all people and our opposition to all forms of discrimination.

[All states have a legal duty under the Genocide Convention to prevent genocide. We call for:](#)

1. An Immediate, Permanent Ceasefire & Full Humanitarian Access
 - o All parties must recommit to diplomacy and dialogue in order to reach a permanent ceasefire, ending all hostilities.
 - o Israel must open border crossings for unrestricted aid.
 - o The international community must fully fund UNRWA and other involved UN agencies.

2. The Application of Robust, Targeted, and Timebound Sanctions, including a Comprehensive Arms Embargo, aimed at ending Israel's genocide in Gaza and the related system of Apartheid.
 - o Diplomatic: Use all diplomatic channels to exert pressure, including by denying visas to officials inciting or justifying genocide/apartheid.
 - o Economic: Suspend trade agreements and ban settlement goods devastating Palestinian livelihoods.
 - o Financial: Freeze assets of officials and settler militias; block transactions funding oppression.
 - o Military: Halt all arms sales, transfers, and military cooperation with Israel
 - o Transport: Block cargo sustaining genocide or apartheid.

3. Respect for International Law and Accountability
 - o The international community must hold Israel accountable to International Law and support the order of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) seeking provisional measures to prevent further harm, and remove any obstacles to

support the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations and rulings into war crimes and crimes against humanity, including apartheid.

- o Demand transparent government reports on compliance with legal duties to prevent genocide and apartheid.

4. Protection of Free Speech and the Right to Protest

- o Legislatures must reject all institutional efforts to criminalize solidarity with Palestine.
- o Authorities must safeguard students, academics, workers, and activists from censorship, cyber harassment, or retaliation for advocating Palestinian rights, while ensuring public spaces remain open for peaceful assemblies demanding ceasefire and justice.
- o Media outlets must center Palestinian voices, commit to facts without bias, and amplify independent journalism documenting Gaza's reality.

5. Dismantling of Oppression and Establishing a Just and Permanent Peace

- o End the occupation and apartheid policies across Palestine.
- o Uphold Palestinian self-determination and refugees' right of return.
- o Ensure equal rights, dignity, and security for Palestinians and Israelis and challenge efforts to silence them – rejecting any system privileging one group over another.

As Quaker signatories, we commit to:

- Advocate relentlessly for the end of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the deliberate starvation campaign, a permanent ceasefire and accountability for atrocities committed in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- Boycott settlement goods and divest from companies profiting from occupation, apartheid, or genocide (e.g., arms manufacturers, settlement financiers).
- Reach out in love to Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities, confronting antisemitism, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hate while refusing to be silent in the face of oppression.
- Highlight the voices of Palestinians, which have still been all-too-absent from media narratives.

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- Support humanitarian relief for Gaza and communities suffering under occupation in the West Bank.
- Advocate for the universal human rights of all people in Palestine and Israel—ensuring they can live in freedom and dignity, without fear, and with lasting peace and security.

We hold in the Light all suffering peoples and leaders, praying they choose justice. In Palestine and Israel, peace built on equality is the only path forward.



American
Friends
Service
Committee



Canadian Friends
Service Committee
Quakers working for justice and peace



Friends Committee
on National Legislation
Lobbying with Quakers



Friends World Committee for Consultation
World Office



Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs



Kvekerhjelp
Quaker Service Norway



QUONO
Quaker United Nations Office

American Friends Service Committee

Quakers in Britain/ Quaker Peace and Social Witness

Canadian Friends Service Committee

Quaker Council on European Affairs

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Quaker Service Norway

Friends World Committee for Consultation

Quaker United Nations Office

World Office

We invite Friends meetings and groups to [discuss, discern, and endorse the statement](#).

Eight Quaker Organizations Draft and Sign Statement Saying Genocide Is Occurring in Gaza

November 14, 2025 By [Sharlee DiMenichi](#)



Protestors gather at a prayer service outside the Friends Committee on National Legislation office in Washington, D.C., calling for a ceasefire and an end to the genocide in the Israel–Gaza War. FCNL’s legislative director for Middle East policy, Hassan El-Tayyab, is seen holding the microphone. The event took place on September 18, 2025, Global Day of Action for Palestine. Photo courtesy of FCNL.

After long periods of discernment, eight Quaker groups signed a [joint statement](#) calling Israel’s war in Gaza genocide. “We believe with moral clarity, and in line with the definition of the crime of genocide, that the current actions in Gaza perpetrated by the Israeli government, constitute the crime of genocide,” the statement reads. The statement was posted to the American Friends Service Committee’s website on July 28.

The statement calls for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and for Palestinians to have full access to humanitarian aid. It advocates for sanctions on Israel, including a complete weapons embargo and freezing the assets of settler militias. It also calls on legislatures to oppose any legal penalties for expressing pro-Palestinian sentiments.

In the war that began on October 7, 2023, Hamas killed approximately 1,200 Israelis and took 251 hostage. The Israel Defense Forces killed more than 67,000 Palestinians, according to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). In the first phase of an October 10, 2025 ceasefire agreement, Israel and Hamas agreed to end attacks. The initial deal provided for the return of 20 living hostages Hamas kidnapped on October 7, 2023, as well as the remains of 28 hostages who had died while being held captive, according to CFR. In exchange, Israel released 250 Palestinian prisoners incarcerated for life as well as 1,700 Gazans in detention. The agreement calls for 600 aid trucks to enter Gaza each day.

The pact was negotiated with the help of the United States, Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt. A second phase of the agreement establishes an International Stabilization Force, according to CFR. President Trump and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair are to lead a board that supervises a transitional government in Gaza.

The July document drafted by the Quaker organizations calls on Friends to advocate for peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians:

Friends have a long history of working for peaceful coexistence and justice for all people in the Middle East. We have witnessed times when Jews, Muslims, and Christians have enjoyed peace and cooperation in the region. Since the creation of the State of Israel, our organizations have supported nonviolent efforts among both Palestinians and Israelis to protect human rights, prevent violence, address the root causes of conflict, and promote peacebuilding. We still believe a peaceful future for all peoples is possible.

Signatories include eight Quaker groups worldwide: American Friends Service Committee, Canadian Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends World Committee for Consultation World Office, Quakers in Britain/Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Quaker Service Norway, and Quaker United Nations Office.

Friends Journal talked with the heads of several signatories about the decision to sign on to the statement.

“Before we determined and used the g-word there was a lot of discernment,” said Joyce Ajlouny, general secretary of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).

Ajlouny is a Palestinian American, and has served as the head of AFSC since 2017.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem (a human rights group in Israel) are three organizations that have determined that genocide is occurring in Gaza. The International Court of Justice determined that there is plausible evidence of genocide, Ajlouny noted.

According to the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which went into effect in 1951 after the end of World War II, genocide involves "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Actions prohibited under the convention include killing group members, severely harming group members (mentally or physically), intentionally creating conditions hostile to the life of group members, deliberately preventing births in the group, and forcibly removing one group's children and placing them with another group.

AFSC staffers' belief that genocide was occurring was also based in part on a 2023 article by Raz Segal, program director of the Master of Arts in Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Stockton University in New Jersey, according to Ajlouny. Segal is an Israeli.

AFSC staffers in the region have also reported destruction that offers evidence of genocide, according to Ajlouny.

"Just five days ago, one of our staff had nine family members killed in an Israeli bombing," Ajlouny said on October 1. The staff member had previously lost his sister, brother-in-law, and two nieces in a different IDF attack. One staff member is undergoing their eleventh housing displacement since the war began.

Ajlouny explained that recently displaced staff members who fled northern Gaza to go to the south have been offering informal education to children who cannot go to school because of the war. They recently held a graduation ceremony for a cohort of children whose education was disrupted.

Staff members in the region cannot find enough food to feed their own families, Ajlouny explained. One staff member has five daughters who cannot find menstrual products in the war zone. The war has destroyed infrastructure so much that survivors in Gaza lack access to toilets, cancer patients have nowhere to get chemotherapy, and dialysis patients cannot get treatment, Ajlouny noted.

AFSC also based its conclusion about genocide on a charge before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The ICJ is weighing South Africa's allegation that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. A final ruling could take years. The court delivered a preliminary opinion in January 2024 stating that the genocide accusation is "plausible."

International legal processes have their place but have limitations, according to Mike Merryman-Lotze, Just Peace Global Policy director at AFSC. He previously worked for 13 years coordinating AFSC's policy and advocacy work in Palestine-Israel and the Middle East.

"It's not a mechanism for taking action and ending what is happening," Merryman-Lotze said.

Britain Yearly Meeting designated several meetings over the course of three days at this year's annual sessions in May to discern a position on whether genocide is occurring in Gaza, according to Oliver Robertson, head of Witness and Worship. Between 600 and 700 Friends attended Britain Yearly Meeting's annual sessions; it was powerful for Friends to participate in such a large community discernment even though the process was long and difficult, Robertson noted.

Some Friends thought it was not Quakers' place to determine whether Israel was committing genocide but that international courts should decide. Some Quakers believed issuing a statement on genocide could damage the public perception of them as peacemakers. Others believed that Friends can be both prophets and reconcilers, Robertson explained.

"We perform different roles at different times," Robertson said.

Other Friends expressed concern about the impact of such a statement on the wider Jewish community, Jewish Quakers, and interfaith relationships. The statement contains a section about not attacking or blaming ordinary Jews or Israelis, Robertson noted.

Signatories to the statement commit to:

Reach out in love to Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities, confronting antisemitism, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hate while refusing to be silent in the face of oppression.

Advocate for the universal human rights of all people in Palestine and Israel—ensuring they can live in freedom and dignity, without fear, and with lasting peace and security.

Jews in Britain and elsewhere struggle intensely with how to respond to the war, Robertson noted.

Friends from Britain Yearly Meeting wrote to Jews with whom they had interfaith relationships, according to Robertson.

Some of the replies included perspectives such as, “We don’t agree with the wording or the language you’re using, but we can see that you’re not trying to hate us or divide us,” Robertson said.

Britain Yearly Meeting’s minute states in part:

And so, we cannot say clearly enough: it is this current Israeli government that we are led to say we believe is committing genocide. Jewish people are not committing genocide. The Israeli people are not committing genocide. We abhor, and will challenge, any attempt to exploit our words to incite, fuel, or commit anti-Jewish and antisemitic hatred or violence. We abhor, and will challenge, any attempt to use our words to question the existence of Israel or the Israeli people’s right to live in peace and security.

Britain Yearly Meeting does not take a full boycott, divestment, and sanctions position, rather they support boycotting settlement products and divesting from companies directly involved in occupying Palestinian territories, according to Robertson. AFSC and the UN keep lists of businesses involved in the occupied territories.

In their discernment, Friends acknowledged violence and trauma on both sides and also expressed concerns about antisemitism and not wanting to negatively impact Jewish communities, according to Bridget Moix, general secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation. The organization discerned internally, and Moix discerned with other heads of Quaker organizations.

“Quakers have tried very much to be on the side of peace and on the side of nonviolence,” said Moix.



Friends World Committee for Consultation explained its decision to endorse the statement by saying:

We appreciate that even in a global peace church, different people have access to different sources of information and will have different perspectives shaped by different theological interpretations. All of us though share and cherish the core teachings of Jesus, including: “You shall not kill” (Matt. 5: 21), “Love Your Neighbour” (Matt. 19:19, Matt. 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27), “Blessed Are the Peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9), “I was hungry, and you fed me” (Matt. 25:35).

As a World Office we are informed by the testimony of Friends who have experienced situations first-hand. We are also aware that there are times when silence could be understood as tacit endorsement. This is why we decided to sign a new statement based on and led-by the experience of Quaker groups that are either based in the Middle East or know it very well through their work.

Britain Yearly Meeting members have also contacted parliamentarians to urge them to discontinue military aid to Israel, Robertson noted.

“We see our actions as part of a wider effort,” Robertson said.

Friends can respond to the genocide statement by contacting their elected officials to advocate for ending the war, Merryman-Lotze observed.

Eighty-four Friends meetings, churches, schools, and organizations had endorsed the statement as of November 13, according to the [post](#) on AFSC’s website.

The statement can support Friends who are advocating for an end to genocide and the war in Gaza, according to Andrew de Sousa, director of Quaker Council for European Affairs.

“We hope that it will give courage to those who are doing it, to continue the work,” de Sousa said.



Sharlee DiMenichi

Sharlee DiMenichi is a staff writer for *Friends Journal*. Contact: sharlee@friendsjournal.org.