

## DRAFT Minute of Exercise on the Middle East Conflict     January 2015

Friends at FMC have met twice in open meetings to explore our response to the conflict in the Middle East. The impetus to testify came out of pain in the summer of 2014 when much violence happened in Gaza. Friends discerned how to respond to the complex conflict in Israel and Palestine. Peace and Social Concern offered two minutes. Many of us feel perplexed and some feel paralyzed. Some felt hope that Light can shine through our despair. One sign of hope is our present engagement in a topic we tend to avoid. Our searching ranged from the practical to the spiritual. We see through the glass darkly only. The injustices on both the Jewish/Israeli and Arab/Palestinian sides go far back. US involvement in the struggle is a key component.

We labored on what unique message or presence Quakers can bring to the Middle East conflict. We find ourselves most directly wanting to speak to US citizens. We recognize the agonizing pain, the protracted struggle and our desire to act by showing compassion and by applying compassion. Both sides have experienced war, living in fear, the noose of homelessness, the loss of a homeland, and employment taken away.

As Friends we trust that there is an answer to the current dilemma: we have faith that we can discover God's truth. Secondly, we respect everyone and will listen to them. More than seeing that of God in everyone, we are asked to 'answer' to that of God in all. We also need to make ourselves available, to go out to encounter those who are suffering directly or indirectly because of this conflict.

We agree that the killing and attacks and the settler movement needs to stop. Killing and violence is not a solution. We know the US gives military aid and sells weapons to many Middle East countries, including Israel. How can we influence the public and our national leaders?

What if we do nothing? Is doing nothing taking a side? Many of us want to stay unbiased so as to listen to all sides. Some of us question whether it's possible to stay neutral. Some of us are concerned about the imbalance of resources and the uneven number of deaths between Israel and Palestine. Who do we listen and respond faithfully to what Spirit asks of us?

Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed;  
Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.  
Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths.  
Lead me in Your truth and teach me, ...  
The humble, He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way.  
All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth,  
To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.  
For Your name's sake, O LORD,  
Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.....  
Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You.  
Let integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
For I wait for You.

*Psalm 25*

**List of Actions Noted** (this is not the Minute of Exercise, just a list of action steps)

- Write a minute. Send our message out. Advocate for an end to violence and state possible steps of reconciliation.
- Support FCNL efforts and visit with legislators to share our Quaker perspectives.
- Ask people at FMC to tell their stories. How have we reconciled and changed regarding this conflict? Invite Friends and others to a compassionate listening event.
- Invite speakers to come to FMC to communicate about the conflict. Invite sharing from people with different perspectives. Friends share our truth with compassion.
- Read and discuss the history from many viewpoints to gain a greater understanding.
- Help with Nonviolent protests in Palestine and Israel. Identify groups that are bringing the two sides together.
- Boycott Israeli exports such as what is happening internationally to Soda Stream, a product produced by settlers in Israel. Participate in the BDS (boycott/divest/sanction) movement.