

Notes Israel-Palestine Threshing Session #3, 1/4/15

Takeaways:

- 1) Jan and Minga present status report at 1/11/15 MBW of the threshing sessions and initial actions being undertaken (see below). The status report would be the initial Minute of Exercise drafted January 2015 with 3 changes. a) in first paragraph of why we are focusing on Israel-Palestine conflict; b) in 4th or 5th paragraph add in 'what is role of international law' in this conflict; b) add that we encourage more of us to engage in this work. Jan and Skip would work on an exercise to bring before MBW to deepen their thinking about this issue.
- 2) Initial actions being undertaken are:
 - a) PSCC starting to compile a list of groups that are doing non-violent protest and bridge-building in Israel-Palestine conflict [the groups would be both those based in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere.] Kitty also recommended talking with David Rush who has good ideas here.
 - b) Skip, Minga and Jan to arrange a follow-on Compassionate Listening Project advanced workshop at FMC over a weekend to more deeply discern the roots of our own views on the Israel-Palestine conflict and to more deeply hear others.
 - c) Everett and Skip to jointly construct timeline of Quaker involvement in Israel-Palestine with a bibliography and Quaker quotes/comments from the time
 - d) Camilla and Bob Seeley to begin to write up what international law has to say about Israel-Palestine conflict.
 - e) Ian to summarize FCNL's actions on the Israel-Palestine conflict.
 - f) The FMC group on Israel-Palestine conflict to continue to meet and come as expeditiously as possible to a shared position on the topic. If this happens in time, and if PSCC and FMC think it would be good, this shared statement could be basis of the pamphlet for Good Friday Peace witness in early April. Next meeting is January 25 7 PM at FMC. Broader FMC community will be advised through the *Bulletin* that material (threshing session minutes, background materials, etc.) is available on the FMC website in the "Events" section.

(1/4/15 meeting: 18 attendees including co-clerks and recording clerk)

Jan shared the draft Minute of Exercise which is meant to capture sense of group over couple of sessions and to distill essence of our current thinking, not actions we might take. This Minute of Exercise might be presented at next MBW on Sunday. Reactions?

- Minute crystallized our discussions from last week and embodied it. It suggests that we have no answers and is it helpful to present this to the broader community.
- I would prefer that we say nothing until we are clear what we want to say. Let's keep meeting until we do know what we want to say. [Kitty: that friend speaks my mind.]
- This is not "the" conflict in the Mid-East, it is a conflict and the conflicts are Arab-Israeli, not Palestinian-Israeli alone.
- Sharing our Minute of Exercise advertises what is going on and might involve others from FMC.

- At end of this meeting we could share more than the Minute of Exercise (MoE) and also talk about next steps that Spirit is leading us to.
- The MoE is meant to be a consolidation of our thinking thus far – not an action. It is meant to crystallize our thinking. None of us think we are done now and can lay this to rest; we can discern further.
- Yes, many of those things were said but we don't say any of them clearly. I missed last meeting but have years of experience with this group and topic. Finding range of things that can be said is very different from discerning 'what does God want us to say on this subject.' Some things in MoE I don't want to oppose but don't find them helpful.
- Work is definitely not done. This is wonderful summary of lots of concerns raised. We are a small portion of FMC and think it is good to help share our work with the larger community and get as many of them interested as possible.
- By sharing with larger FMC community, they will know that these conversations have begun and some of the sense of those conversations and begin thinking about these as well.
- One thing from last meeting that wasn't included here was 'why are we focused on this issue?' 'why not on other things that concern us as well?'
 - Second sentence indicates that we are focused just on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- If this was passed at this meeting, why wouldn't we include the 'action points' as well. I find some of them meaningful.
- Think discussion of "settler movement" is biased since we'd have to include negative things that Palestinians also doing. Would prefer to leave this out. Boycotting was not a shared sense of group. Very hard to keep our biases out of discussion but we should try to hold to this.
- Somebody in our meetings talked about role of international law. Richard Falk writes cogently about Palestine and "lost causes" in a *Nation* article that is being circulated.
 - We need as a community to better understand the role of international law in this conflict.
 - In 5th paragraph we might ask about role of international law in this conflict.
- I appreciate MoE and notes from second threshing session. I appreciate goal of having sense of enough commonality. One of important elements of this is teasing apart the individual from the acts the individual carries out. We can love the individual but be critical of actions undertaken by him/her. Same goes for states. You don't have to delegitimize Israel or Palestine to criticize actions according to our moral standards (wrong or evil). Can still reach out to states and interact with them, even as you criticize them...

Minga noted hearing 3 additions to minute and a subtraction. 1) in first paragraph that we are wrestling with complexity and why focusing on Israel-Palestine conflict; 2) in 4th or 5th paragraph add in 'what is role of international law'; 3) add that we encourage more of us to engage in this work. Taking out "settler movement"?

- Probably leave settler movement in since that it is core of dispute but add in negative Palestinian issues.

- Change “killing and attacks” to “both Israeli and Palestinian killing and attacks”. [Killings and attacks on both sides must stop.]
- Do we have to say about the right of Israel to exist? Some Israeli parties don’t believe that there should be any right of a Palestinian state to exist. Despite mutually exclusive positions we can state that we still have a Quaker belief in peace.
- Missing the word ‘occupation’ in this description.

Jan reiterated that the MoE is meant to distill our conversation to-date. It is not meant to clarify every possible issue.

- MoEs are very controversial in Quaker circles. Many times they are negatively perceived and a way for leaders to find something to say. Let’s decide later what we want to say and have faith that way will open. Don’t like the sourcing. None of this represents me. Everything the Palestinians do wrong, we need to find a way to help them what to say about this. Ditto for Israel. We don’t have to find balance, we need to find truth.
- What do we want from MoE?

Jan noted that purpose is to share some of our conversation with larger community (without all the richness) and make clear that the conversation is by no means finished, but that community is taking a serious look at this.

- Could we simply have a status report on what is taking place. Like them to hear what we are wrestling with.
- What will we be saying about why we are wrestling with this issue?
- We are wrestling with complexities of many of other conflicts but focusing here because of the recent escalation of the conflict and deaths this summer.
- We could note that we are complicit because we are a major supplier of weapons there. [Also true of most disputes in the Mid-East.]
- We are led to work on this issue.
- Israel is largest beneficiary of US international aid and Israel is a very powerful lobby to the US.
- We supply arms to Egypt where many horrible things happen. Can indicate that this is an area where we have agency and responsibility. We can speak to our representatives. This is only a piece of why we are meeting on this issue.

[Sense of group was that, with noted changes, we will share this as a report, not as a MoE.]

Jan affirmed that we will present this report to MBW next Sunday with changes. Now move on to the action steps. In itemizing the action steps, we didn’t try to prioritize or determine a specific chronological order. There are some things that we need to share more deeply with each other since we were very tender with each other in first few meetings. Are these the actions we want to pursue and in what order?

- Add to the list the “compassionate listening project” to the 3rd bullet

- A small group (4-5 of us). Tom Ash, Dotty, Dinah, ?? met with legislators. Contributed \$10,000 to Gaza Mental Health project – could add financial contributions to the list. Let's go there (only 2-3 of us have been there) and meet with Quakers and others.
- The next to last bullet is too vague. We need to support these peacemakers in MidEast and visit them or support them financially.
- What are non-violent protests in Israel and Palestine? [Answers: many such groups, Mothers in Black,...] Why don't we network with churches and Quakers in other countries about non-violent approaches to this and draw attention to this worldwide, maybe at same time as they are protesting.

Minga asked whether a group (PSCC?) want to make a list of non-violent groups for our consideration?

- Just gathering that information and making that information available at FMC and beyond is important. We need to know the courageous actions being undertaken.
- Would help groups in Israel and Palestine to know that their work is being held up. [Should broaden beyond protests to actions.]
- Noted that David Rush would be of assistance in putting us in contact with peace groups in Israel.

Jan asked if PSCC could take this work on? PSCC agreed to start to build a list.

Jan noted that we had talked about the need to share our own feelings with others more deeply, both to learn how others feel and to model for others. How might that happen and is there life for this idea?

- Compassionate Listening Project does this. Leah Green says that there are plenty of skilled facilitators and she might even come and lead an advanced workshop for discussions in a deep manner on this topic over a weekend. [Minga and Jan are also interested in moving ahead on this.]

Alison introduced herself noting that she was student at Smith and visited Jerusalem. Now works with Cooperative Ministries and willing to be resource. Interest among Cooperative Ministries Board in doing some work on Israel-Palestine.

It was noted that there are deep Quaker roots on this subject. Called to visit Israel in 1948 and then called back in 1968(?) by UNRA. Everett willing to compile a timeline and will work with Skip on this. Everett to add some of Quaker comments at the time by them and will include bibliography.

Jan affirmed that there was unity among the group on 3 next steps: 1) Developing chronology; 2) Compiling list of peacemakers in mid-East; and 3) arranging for Compassionate Listening Project. Do these need to happen before we take other action steps?

- Developing a minute crystallizes our understanding and gets our conflicts out in open. Thinks this could occur in parallel with other actions.
- I'm hearing prior concern that 'Take your time; don't be in a hurry to speak.'

- These action steps will give certainly me a broader knowledge and open my mind in a way that I can listen differently and learn. We will write a better minute if we do these things first.
- If Leah doesn't come until May, are we supposed to be dormant until then?
- We have an opportunity with our annual Good Friday witness for peace in early April. Every year we hand out a leaflet which is focused on an issue. Seems like this is the issue before us. If so, our challenge is to see if we can figure out what we want to say within 3 months. We don't have to solve the conflict but raise important issues. This could be real challenge for us.
- What would ability to come to shared minute mean for 3 lobes of beneficial cycle (witness, community, worship) and what would it mean for this if we can't say anything to world beyond on this?
- Suggestion to leave to PSCC to decide whether they feel called to have Good Friday witness focused on the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Minga noted that PSCC did focus on this issue and came up with 2 minutes. PSCC might want to bring to MBW to see if new authors also want to focus on this topic.

- It was noted that PSCC is supposed to get broader input on these leaflets distributed at Good Friday witness.
- When we've asked in past, there has been no input.
- We are engaged in difficult process and find it hard to speak even to our own meeting. This seems the wrong reason for trying to write to a broader audience if we can't decide what to say to ourselves yet. Are we doing this just to meet a deadline? Should see this as a deep spiritual challenge for us on to answer on God's time.
- How are we going to continue to search for the truth? Doesn't seem honest to delegate to a committee?
- We have a group right here. We shouldn't have an artificial deadline but expeditiously move forward on this issue while we focus on other efforts and see how quickly we can come to a shared understanding on this. [This seemed to resonate with the group.]

Jan noted that when we develop unity on a minute we can see if this would be timely for Good Friday or not.

I'm not usually very optimistic but there are lots of things we agree on. We know we are against violence and we are for listening to the truth in all persons.

Jan noted that the immense work on prior drafts will be a very useful foundation.

[When asked if they would continue to guide the effort, Jan and Minga felt they needed to do more discernment as to whether they are the right ones to continue to lead us through this effort.]

- Good Friday comes a few weeks after the Israel election so this issue will be all over the press. Also comes 3 months after Israel brought into international criminal court and charges may be filed. If we draft something, we will have to be careful but we want to ensure it is careful so we do not sound foolish.

Minga noted that we are doing our homework now and we are moving towards clarity. If we don't have clarity, we don't have to speak. Is there a group that wants to help educate us more about international law. Camilla and Bob willing to do this. [Alison can also be asked.]

Jan offered appreciation for all the energy and diligence the group has brought to this issue.

Ian offered to summarize what FCNL doing on this issue. His offer was gratefully accepted.

- Who is bringing this to MBW? Can we introduce the topic with an exercise that gets everyone engaged on this topic without being controversial. For example, What is your first memory of Israel-Palestine conflict and what were your feelings associated with that?

Jan relayed that we may have substantial time available for this topic since FORJ may not be presenting at MBW.

- In discussing who would present at MBW, it was noted that anyone from this group could be presenting. Minga asked if anyone from group feel led to present to MBW?

Minga will present the report. Are we comfortable with an exercise? [group concurred.] Jan will work with Skip to develop an exercise.

- How can we help people know that all this information is available on the web?
 - All information is available under "Events" on FMC website. Agree that it will go out through Bulletin.

Clarified that the group is not telling PSCC that leaflet for Good Friday should be on Mid-East.

Next meeting of group is: Jan 25 7 PM at FMC.