



American Friends of Combatants for Peace

Oct 11, 2023 Letter

Dear Friends,

Thank you to all who have shared support and words of care. Thank you also for your compassion as we figure out how to navigate through this devastating time. We know that many of you have loved ones in Israel and Palestine and are carrying tremendous sorrow and fear as we watch unthinkable events transpire. Please know that we are holding you close in our hearts. May you be surrounded by support and comfort.

On Monday, as CfP members grieved, sought safety, and processed the unthinkable, we held our first bi-national (Israeli and Palestinian) Zoom support group since Hamas' brutal attacks on innocent Israelis and the ensuing violence on Gazans. When we logged onto Zoom, Jamil, CfP's Palestinian General Coordinator, began the conversation. He looked around the Zoom room at his Israeli friends and shared that it was hard to find the words to express his sorrow, shock, and grief about what Hamas had done.

“I can't believe this. I am seeing these images, and I don't want to believe they are real. I cannot hold back my tears. You are my friends, my family.” Other Palestinian activists echoed words of care to Israeli members:

“I am with you. I'm going to stay with you.”

“I wish I could see you and hold you.”

At the start of the conversation, it was hard not to speak from “sides” about the pain, needs, and remorse for the violence coming from each society. After some time, Yonatan, CfP's Israeli Executive Director, reflected, “We are talking as if we belong to the extreme parts of our communities, but we belong to each other. **We chose each other. We are not our societies; we are humans.**”

When a member asked if we could meet on Zoom every few days for mutual support, Israeli CfP co-founder Itamar spoke to our Palestinian members through tears, “I know things are going to get much worse. After we witness what Israel will do to Gaza, I don't know if I will be able to look into your eyes.” A Palestinian member replied, **“What sets us apart is that we can see each other. We can see each other's pain. This is how we must stay.”**

As their American friends, we watched over this three-hour Zoom how the very thing our beloved peace activists have been working to stop, the escalating violence they have tried to nonviolently prevent together, had now come for them, and how it shattered their hearts. And as we bore witness to their great pain, we also witnessed their great love and commitment to each other grow stronger.

With the desire to speak out together against the current violence, one topic members wrestled with on the Zoom was the danger some Palestinians may face when speaking out in their communities. We also

learned one of our Israeli members had been targeted in her community for speaking against further violence from Israel. Yet the resolve was clear amongst all our members that they could not be silent, that they must bear any risks to speak out and call for peace. As such, CFP has updated their joint statement:

We declare our desire to live together in peace, free from wars, occupation, and hatred. We were born to live, not to die.”

Jamil Qassas, Combatants for Peace Co-Chair

The events of the past few days have shaken us all to our core. Our hearts are with all of the victims and their families, and we hope both for the safe return of those held captive and for the safety of the civilians trapped inside Gaza. Combatants for Peace strongly and unequivocally condemns all acts of violence. There can be no justification for the targeting of children or the collective punishment of the innocent. Together, we must retain our humanity and value all human life as equal, sacred, and cherished.

The situation is still unclear and unfolding, but the difficult questions are already beginning to be asked, and rightly so. What is painfully clear is that this extreme right-wing settler government is showing its inability to keep anyone safe. A government that, since its formation, has only focused on itself and its agenda to occupy and annex the West Bank, appease those that stand in its way, and entrench the separation of Israelis and Palestinians. We as a community cannot detach ourselves from the extremism and incitement that this government has been promoting since it formed, and the result is the biggest security failure that the State of Israel has ever known. For the sake of every Israeli and Palestinian life - it must go.

For our movement, this is a crucial moment where we must all dig deep to find our resolve to move ahead together. The only solution is ending the occupation, uniting Israelis and Palestinians, and focusing our collective efforts on achieving peace. We call for nonviolence, a renewed sense of humanity, and better days ahead for all of our children.

**לוחמים לשלום
مقاتلون من أجل السلم
COMBATANTS FOR PEACE**

