



Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

At the Yearly Meeting in London at Friends House and online,
23–26 May 2025

Minute 30: Gaza

Our clerks have prepared the following statement on the current situation in Gaza drawing on our discernment earlier in our Yearly Meeting. We are deeply distressed by the conflict that we are praying over, and we have struggled with how to find unity. We are led to unite with this statement, as amended in our meeting.

“Fear is what happens in the absence of love.’ (Emily Provance, Swarthmore Lecture 2025)

Radical peacemaking requires us to engage with and to acknowledge truth in all its discomfort, complexity and cruelty. Quakers historically have spoken truth to power. We need to heed the promptings of love and truth in our hearts and speak up now.

Last year, Meeting for Sufferings minuted its alignment with the International Court of Justice rulings that the term apartheid was an accurate description of the situation in occupied Palestine and that there was a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza. Meeting for Sufferings felt compelled to speak out following decades of direct Quaker witness and peace work in Palestine and Israel.

Since then, we have watched with horror as the Israeli government has deepened its collective punishment of Palestinians for the heinous, unjustified crimes of Hamas on 7 October 2023.

Over the last three months, we have witnessed the deliberate mass starvation of a people and dismantling of almost all life-sustaining systems within Gaza. We have seen the forced movement of Palestinians and a stated intention to expel them from Gaza. We have heard Israeli government ministers incite hatred against and dehumanise Palestinians. We have heard language and witnessed actions that cannot be justified and strike at the core of our common humanity.

In a world where we are seeing cases in many countries of outrageous inhumanity, dehumanisation and the cruel actions that follow from denying the worth and dignity of all, what is being done in Gaza is no less terrible for not being unique. Our long history of witness and peace work in Palestine and Israel gives us particular experience from which to speak on this issue. The fact that we are speaking about Gaza does not absolve us of our responsibility to learn about and respond to other atrocities around the world.

We understand that genocide under international law must meet certain strict criteria. It

means specific acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Genocide scholars are clear that genocide does not constitute one overwhelming, horrific act only, but is a process with many stages.

With this in mind, and guided by the testimony and judgement of Palestinians, Israelis, and genocide and legal experts we look to and work with, we are therefore led to say that we believe that genocide and mass displacement are underway in the actions of the Israeli government and its military towards the population of Gaza, recognising that a legal judgement on this is a matter for the International Courts.

We know that for many in the Jewish community, this word brings deep and real fear. Fear that the term 'genocide' fuels antisemitism, that it attacks their core Jewish identity and safety. That it reduces a complex, existential conflict to a simple story of 'good' and 'bad'. We acknowledge the historical weight of this term for Jewish people, set against centuries of anti-Jewish hatred and crimes, and the ultimate horror and genocide of the Holocaust. We acknowledge the history and present day reality of anti-Jewish hatred in the UK, a hatred that was exported worldwide by British and other European colonial powers. We acknowledge the historic and current role of the British state in creating the context of this conflict and the tragedy we see playing out now.

Central to Quakerism is the experience that there is that of God in everyone. From this belief – that all people are unique, precious, children of God – all others follow. We therefore abhor racism, including antisemitism, in all its forms. We grieve the pain and fear that our friends in Jewish communities are experiencing at this time.

We see and uphold those in Jewish communities and in Israel working for peace and justice for Palestinian people.

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.

It is also a tenet of Quakerism that violence can never be the answer. That the means are just as important as the ends. This is our peace testimony that has led us for more than 350 years to eschew all war and all violence at all times. We cry out for the violence in Gaza to stop – for an end to the killing of Palestinians and for the Israeli hostages to be returned home. We cry out for Palestinians and Israelis to be safe and to live thriving, joyous lives in their homelands. Everyone deserves a place to live where they don't feel scared. Our long work for peace tells us that security for some bought with the insecurity of others tears at our collective humanity and is only ever temporary. Peace can never be brought about by the systematic oppression of others.

We therefore use the word 'genocide' after deep discernment. We use this word with the aim of opening eyes, minds and hearts. We use this word in the deep hope that the actions it describes will stop."

We know that making a statement is not enough. We draw Friends' and meetings' attention to Meeting for Sufferings minutes S/11/04/4 from April 2011, which asks Friends throughout Britain

Yearly Meeting to boycott settlement goods, until such time as the occupation is ended, and MfS/18/10/19 from October 2018, which asks BYM to avoid investing in companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine.

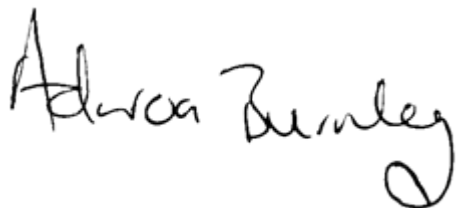
We ask Friends and meetings to reach out in love to Jewish people and communities they have connections with, and to understand and learn about atrocities across the world.

We send this minute to Quaker Peace & Social Witness, and uphold them as they communicate this statement to partners working for peace in the region.

We send this minute to Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, and uphold them as they communicate this statement and seek to reassure our friends in the Jewish community and in other faiths of our continued support and love.

We hold in the light the people governing Israel and Palestine and pray that they are moved towards peace and compassion.

We uphold those in positions of power and pray for them as they “seek light on the road to peace.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adwoa Burnley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Adwoa" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and the surname "Burnley" follows it, also in cursive. The signature is positioned in the lower-left area of the page, above the printed name and title.

Adwoa Burnley

Clerk