

# **More Light Presbyterians' Official Statement Regarding Palestine and Call for Permanent Ceasefire**

## **Preamble**

During its April 2024 retreat, the board and staff of More Light Presbyterians grappled with the catastrophic impact of the U.S. unequivocal support of the state of Israel's war against Hamas, with indiscriminate aggression against Gaza. While recognizing the 70+ year occupation of Palestine begun by the formation of the state of Israel as well as the state-sanctioned violence it has inflicted upon the land and its people, we reflected upon the ways in which the state of Israel's disproportionate response to the terrorist attacks of October 7th reveals a greater commitment to collective punishment than to peace and safety of its people, an intent of ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip, and the expansion of settlements that are illegal under international law.

This war on Gazans is intersectional. As an organization that advocates for queer inclusion and flourishing, we see in this conflict the same forces at play that threaten our lives: unbridled militarization, greed, colonial expansion, dehumanizing rhetoric, and a callous disregard for human rights. This conflict is a mass-disabling event and disproportionately impacts women, children, and the elderly; MLP states that "oppression is always intersectional."

We lift up the courageous witness of students across our nation and globally as they challenge their institutions to divest from a war machinery and a military enterprise that is killing people abroad and here at home. We stand on the shoulders of the Israel Palestine Mission Network, the work already done by the Presbyterian Church (USA), and Jewish and Palestinian groups advocating for peace and human rights. We lament that our statement comes seven months into this conflict. We are a diverse board and staff, with differing perspectives and opinions. This statement is the product of our ongoing discernment toward our shared values that undergird our diverse commitments to this work.

## **Whereas...**

- More Light Presbyterians, as a queer organization, is well aware of the horrors and violence that religious extremism engenders and of

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the devastation it wreaks when allowed to reduce the humanity and dignity of any people;

- More Light Presbyterians, as a queer organization, is called to resist all forms of identity-based marginalization and oppression, as well as the ideological distortions upon which these are rooted;
- More Light Presbyterians aims to “journey towards God’s promised liberation and flourishing for all creation,” an aim that is hindered by capitalist greed, relentless warmongering, toxic nationalism, and deeply rooted colonialist logics that condition us to accept the disposability of people and nature;
- More Light Presbyterians recognizes that oppression is always intersectional, compounding the oppression of vulnerable populations in ways that exacerbate and deepen their marginalization; so that “nobody’s free until everybody’s free” (Fannie Lou Hamer);
- More Light Presbyterians acknowledges that most of us are implicated in systems of dehumanization and must learn more about antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Christian Zionism in order to begin a process of disentangling ourselves; in the words of the Belhar Confession: “we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel”<sup>1</sup>;
- More Light Presbyterians and its board are deeply rooted in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and thus are convicted by the call to “bear witness to Christ by nourishing the moral life of the church and the nation for the sake of peace in our world”<sup>2</sup>
- More Light Presbyterians stands on the witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which in 2014 was the “first mainline denomination to divest from companies involved in human rights abuses against Palestinians at a time when such a move was still controversial.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf) Accessed May 22, 2024

<sup>2</sup> [Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling \(presbyterianmission.org\)](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/) : Accessed May 22, 2024

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/resolution-on-violence-religion-and-terrorism-2004-2/>

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Therefore, the board and staff of More Light Presbyterians join the voices of people of faith and values demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. MLP denounces Hamas's terrorist attacks of October 7th and the ensuing uncritical support of the Biden Administration, the U.S. Congress, and the State Department of the State of Israel and its political leaders, which have resulted in the deaths of over 35,000 Palestinians<sup>4</sup>—among them at least 12,300 children<sup>5</sup>—the displacement of 1.7 million more,<sup>6</sup> and the injuring of close to 79,000 Palestinians<sup>7</sup>.

More Light Presbyterians encourages its network of congregations to advocate for:

- 1) the cessation of all military operations;
- 2) a firm commitment to a solution that provides for the wellbeing of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and that includes a dismantling of illegal settlements;
- 3) the release of unjustly held Palestinians in Israeli prisons<sup>8</sup>; and
- 4) the return of Israeli hostages to their families.

We urge our fellow Presbyterians to join us as we engage in continued learning. Here are some action steps:

- 1) register for action alerts from the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness.
- 2) watch the ongoing PC(USA) recorded webinar series on Christian Zionism
- 3) Follow the Israel-Palestinian Mission Network of the PCUSA - @ipmn\_pcusa
- 4) reach out to an anti-war encampment near you and ask what resources they need;
- 5) stay tuned for more posts from us in the coming weeks expanding upon our above statement.

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<sup>4</sup> [Gaza death toll: UN says number of deaths remains unchanged after controversy | CNN](#): Accessed May 22, 2024

<sup>5</sup> [Gaza: Number of children killed higher than from four years of world conflict | United Nations in Türkiye](#): Accessed May 22, 2024

<sup>6</sup> [Palestine - Conflict in Gaza leaves 83 per cent of the population internally displaced in less than three months | IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(internal-displacement.org\)](#): Accessed May 22, 2024

<sup>7</sup> [Israel & Palestinian territories: number of fatalities & injuries caused by the Israel & Hamas war 2023 | Statista](#): Accessed May 22, 2024

<sup>8</sup> [How Israel jails hundreds of Palestinians without charge \(bbc.com\)](#): Accessed May 22, 2024