

5/24/2022

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

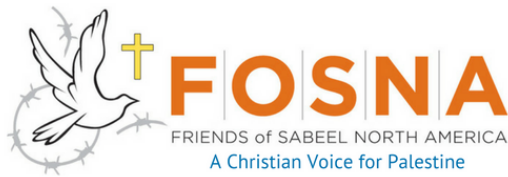
Dear President Biden,

In your forthcoming visit to the Holy Land, it is our hope that you take time to address the concerns of local Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem. We hope that you would meet with local church leaders as well as representatives of local Christian organizations to hear of their desire for a shared Jerusalem, open and accessible to all and not the exclusive domain of Jewish Israelis.

Christian clergy in Jerusalem have complained for years about an ongoing series of assaults, attacks, insults, and harassment by Jewish extremists in the Old City, as well as the defacement of their churches, property, and graveyards. They have also experienced what seems to be a determined campaign by Jewish Israeli groups to take over church properties in and around Jerusalem, relying on harassment, pressure, secret deals with corrupt officials, and forgeries. The response by the Israeli authorities used to be that such activities constituted individual acts by a fringe group of Jewish extremists who hated Christians, and who were as much of a headache to the authorities as they were to the Christian Churches.

With spurious excuses, Israel also restricts Muslims and Christians access to Jerusalem and its holy places. Having illegally annexed East Jerusalem, it treats Palestinians from nearby Bethlehem, Ramallah, and the rest of the West Bank and Gaza as foreigners who cannot come into the Holy City without permission from Israel. The apartheid nature of the state of Israel leaves all power in the hands of a government dedicated only to Jewish interests, rather than the interests of all the peoples of the land. In the city of Jerusalem, such a policy only leads to hatred, conflict, and bloodshed. Jerusalem is important to Jews, but it is also vitally important to Christians and Muslims.

This year witnessed an escalation of settler encroachment and attacks by Jewish extremists, as well as increased evidence of direct Israeli government involvement. This Easter, and for the first time ever, Israeli police announced that they would restrict the number of worshippers at the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulcher) for the Ceremony of the Holy Fire to 1000 (the church holds about 11,000) and would limit the number of Christians coming into the Old City on Easter to a mere 500. At the same time, a group of settlers who were escorted by Israeli police forcibly broke into and occupied church property near the Jaffa Gate (claiming that they had purchased these rights, in a shady deal that is being contested in the courts.)



The Israeli extremists behind these attacks are no longer a fringe group in Israel, but are now openly represented in the Knesset and even within the ruling government coalition. These religious fanatics are now framing their plans as being integral to the Zionist goal of exclusive Jewish control over Jerusalem, which they claim must be a Jewish city under the sole control of Israel. Meanwhile, secular Zionists who have no interest in a religious war with Muslims or Christians are nonetheless happy to assert exclusive Jewish claims to Jerusalem as a national, political goal.

Christian Zionists, who were close to the previous administration, also use religious arguments (if spurious) to support their political positions, claiming that support for Zionist goals in Jerusalem is somehow part of God's plan for the End Times. It is shameful that such groups not only support Jewish religious extremists but evidence a clear hostility towards both Muslims and local Palestinian Christians. They would be delighted to see a bloody, catastrophic religious war that in their thinking will bring about Armageddon and hasten the Second Coming.

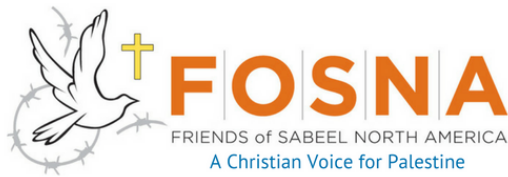
The assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American Christian journalist from Jerusalem, and the disgraceful behaviour of the Israeli police at her funeral highlight the need for an end to the Occupation, in accordance with international law. It likewise highlights the need that Palestinians living under Israeli rule have for international protection and the need to safeguard freedom of religion, free access to the holy places, and a peaceful sharing of the Holy City within the terms of the historic Status Quo arrangements, in existence prior to Israel's assertion of total control over the city.

President Biden, we implore you to uphold your stated commitment to human rights and international law, supporting arrangements that uphold human dignity and freedom of religion for all the peoples of the land. We desire free access to the Holy Places for believers seeking to worship God "in spirit and in truth," as opposed to those who would abuse God's name by using it to assert exclusive political claims. The delicate balance enshrined in the historic Status Quo agreements should be meticulously observed, and exclusivist claims on behalf of any one of the three monotheistic religions must be resisted as a formula for disaster for all concerned. Jerusalem is too important to be the sole domain of any one group, and it must be shared by all.

We pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the safety and prosperity of all who hold it dear (Psalm 122:6).

Sincerely,
Jonathan Kuttab

Executive Director, Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)

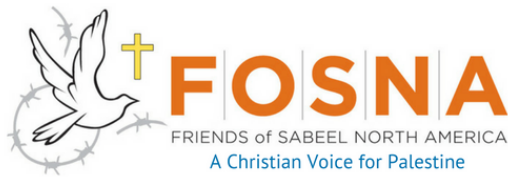


Endorsements

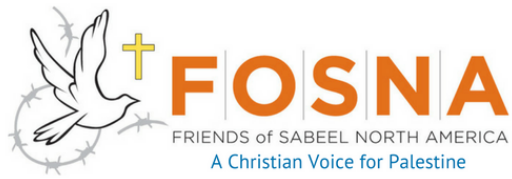
Committee for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Disciples Palestine Israel Network
Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Palestine Israel Network
FOSNA Pittsburgh
Green Mountain Solidarity With Palestine
Indiana Center for Middle East Peace
Kairos USA
Middle East Justice and Peace Group of South Central PA
Pax Christi USA
United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network
United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR)

The Rev. Fahed AbuAkel, Moderator of the 214th General Assembly of the PCUSA
The Rev Dr John Anderson, Co-Moderator of The Israel Palestine Mission Network (PCUSA)
The Rev. Lynn Bozich Shetzer, Presbyterian Church (USA)
The Rev Ruth Buxman, First Mennonite Church
Rabbi Meryl Crean, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
The Rev. Chad Collins, Valley View Church PCUSA
The Rev Katherine Cunningham, Christian Zionism Working Group of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
The Rev. Elice Higginbotham, United Church of Christ (retired)
The Rev. Dr. David Hindman, United Methodist Church
Dr. John Kane, Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies, Regis University, CO
Fr. George Makhoulouf, Eastern Orthodox Archdiocese of North America
The Rev. Jennifer McKenna, Market Square Presbyterian Church, Harrisburg, PA
Sister Mary McMahan, Gray Nuns of the Sacred Heart
The Rev. Fredrica Meitzen, Retired Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Rev Sonya Reichel, Assistant Rector, Faith Episcopal Church
The Rev. Dr. V. Bruce Rigdon Rigdon, President Emeritus at Ecumenical Theological Seminary and Professor of Church History
The Rev. Lynne Rigg, Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, MN
The Rev Blake Rohrer, Pastor Midvale Community Lutheran Church
The Rev. Jo Roos, Co-Chair, Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), Co-Convener of Mennonite
The Rev Crystal Silva-McCormick, Church of the Savior, United Church of Christ
The Rev Keith Spencer, Trinity Lutheran Church Pembroke Pines
The Rev Martha Stone, Henrietta United Church of Christ
The Rev. Thomas Sweet, Market Square Presbyterian Church, Harrisburg, PA
The Rev. Nick Utphall, Advent Lutheran Church, Madison, WI

Judith Beck, Co-Convener, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace for Israel/Palestine
Allie Perry, Chair, United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network Steering Committee
Barbara Wilhelm, Diversified People Solutions



Mike Butkiewicz, St Lawrence Catholic Community
Pauline Coffman, Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East Policy
Joyce Cassel, Co-Chair, Chicago First Church of the Brethren
Jeff Wright, Co-Coordinator, Disciples Palestine Israel Network
Gail Hull, Adams County Human Relations Council
Elder Margaret D Kooistra, Market Square Presbyterian Church, Harrisburg, PA
Deacon Susan Lindberg Haley, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Skip Schiel, Friends Meeting at Cambridge (Quaker)
Roger Kulp, Answer Coalition
Richard Burrill, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York, PA
Leslie Lomas, Louis P. Singer Fund, Inc.
Wally Yazbak, Kiwanis International Lt. Governor Elect, GA District
Jane Thomas, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Boulder, CO
Johnny Zokovitch, Executive Director of Pax Christi USA
Susan Rhodewalt, Clerk (Chairperson) of Ministry and Care, Quaker (Society of Friends)
Donna Barker, Voices for Justice in Palestine, Walnut Creek, CA
Palestine Israel Network, Co-Founder and Publisher Emeritus of *Sojourners Magazine*
Abigail Abysalh Metzger, Pax Christi International representative to the NGO Working Group on Israel/Palestine at the United Nations
Gail Hull, Adams County Human Relations Council
Kendall Granberry, BYP100 Chicago
Mary Allen, Christian Jewish-Allies for a Just Peace in Israel Palestine
Jane Menocal, Director of Networking, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Nora Burridge, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Katherine Sullivan, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Rich Gardner, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Joan Hazbun, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Rebekah Levin, Treasurer, Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine
Claudette Haring, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Linda Trout, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Donna Hicks, Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Palestine Israel Network
Jeff Curtiss, Episcopal Network for Economic Justice
Newland Smith, Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Palestine Israel Network
Priscilla Read, Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Palestine Israel Network
Randall Heyn-Lamb, Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Palestine Israel Network
Bo Fauth, Episcopal Peace Fellowship-Palestine Israel Network
Marilyn Sutton Loos, Author
Janice Miller, Friends of Sabeel Colorado
Ray Doherty, Managing Director, Green Mountain Solidarity With Palestine
Noushin Framke, Israel Palestine Mission Network of the PCUSA
Marta Guttenberg, Jewish Voice for Peace
Margaret Kiekhaefer, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Judith Shelper, Market Square Presbyterian Church
Sandra Mackie, Middle East Justice and Peace Group of Central PA



Brad Schlegel, Peace Not Walls, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Mary Day Kent, Chestnut Hill Friends Meeting
Lisa Bender, Chair, United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR)
Sherrill Futrell, Researcher of History, University of California, Los Angeles
Gerald Heidel, US Campaign for Palestinian Rights
Louise Lisi, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Philadelphia, PA
Alice Hatzenbeller, Director of Mission and Pastoral Care at Clement Manor, Milwaukee, WI