

## **Middle East Collaborative Report to Annual Sessions 2025**

Friends, The Middle East Collaborative report to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting below follows the format of reports submitted in 2023 and 2024. Given almost daily reports of atrocities from Gaza, the West Bank, and/or Lebanon, it has been a challenging year. Supporting each other facing realities in our activism while attempting to bring hope has been a delicate, often tricky, sometimes futile undertaking. Supporting our work for peace with justice and equity will not end; we find energy in our connections around the cause for education and peace.

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### **What do you want the PYM body (all 10,000 of us in PYM membership) to know about your collaborative?**

- ◆ Middle East Collaborative (MEC) of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting grew out of the former PYM Middle East Working Group. We are Friends, most from PYM, who gather on a regular basis to consider Middle East related developments, trusted resources for news, and our own activism going forward. Many of our members have lived in the Middle East for a number of years; others have visited. While we tend to focus on Israel/Palestine as well as Lebanon, we have Friends who share experiences and concerns regarding Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE.
- ◆ We have regular and direct connections to the two Quaker Meetings and the schools for which the Meetings care. Ramallah Friends Meeting and School in West Bank, Palestine and Brummana Friends Meeting and Brummana High School in the hills east of Beirut, Lebanon are surviving in difficult times with inspirational leadership.
- ◆ For three winters a small group of MEC has led a virtual course *Why Palestine Matters*. With support from Friends and friends in our various networks, we have been able to offer guest speakers on relevant topics of both history and current political affairs. Justice, intersectionality, colonialism, and non-violent direct action possibilities are all themes that weave through the six session course.
- ◆ Along with some of our colleagues in related networks, MEC has approved the AFSC's Apartheid-Free pledge. The campaign which began about two years ago has now over 520 signees. A number of monthly meetings in PYM have endorsed the pledge.

### **How does your group meet and how frequently?**

- ◆ Middle East Collaborative meets every other month, First Sunday at 1:30pm: January, March, May, July, September, November. We have met virtually since mid 2020 and likely will continue via that mode. We aim for one in-person meeting per summer, often a potluck in late August or early September. All are welcome -- virtual and/or in person.

**How is the work of the collaborative being shared with the PYM community?**

- ◆ It has been our recent practice to present a workshop at PYM Annual Sessions.
- ◆ News of our minutes for ceasefire in Gaza and our endorsement of the Apartheid-Free pledge has been posted on the MEC website which is within the umbrella of the PYM website.
- ◆ Presenters from MEC have been invited guests at a number of monthly meetings.
- ◆ A timeline of Quaker involvement in the Middle East beginning over 150 years ago has been posted also on the MEC website. We welcome suggestions for additions to the information on the timeline. Embedded in the timeline are links to further explore a specific topic.

**How does your collaborative remain spiritually grounded through its work?**

- ◆ We begin and end each meeting with a time of silence. We enjoy 'check-ins' as a means of staying connected to each other and the spiritual bases in our individual actions. At our annual in-person meeting we share a lengthy worship time. We hold in the Light MEC members challenged by the stress of daily news of atrocities together with all those in regions of conflict.

**A report showing possible budget needs.**

- ◆ Possible mailing of Why Palestine Matters books.
- ◆ Honoraria –perhaps including travel reimbursement-- for guest speakers at Monthly Meetings or at workshops.
- ◆ Print materials to accompany workshops during Annual Sessions or presentations at monthly or quarterly meetings.
- ◆ Travel reimbursement and/or registration costs for MEC members to attend Middle East related events.
- ◆ Covering costs of tech support for presentations (live or virtual.)

**What are the major accomplishments for the year?**

- ◆ Presentation to Annual Sessions Saturday July 6, 2025
- ◆ Subcommittee outreach to Friends Fiduciary for conversations regarding FF's investment policies particularly in regard to the conflict in Gaza.
- ◆ Endorsing the Apartheid-Free pledge.
- ◆ Support and encouragement to PYM Monthly and Quarterly meetings in re conversations and possible endorsement of the Apartheid-Free pledge.
- ◆ Six virtual sessions of Why Palestine Matters. Feb-March 2025
- ◆ Presentations at the invitation of individual monthly and quarterly meetings about topics chosen by the meeting. Included was a presentation to a parent group at Sidwell Friends School.
- ◆ Referrals to interested Friends of Middle East travel possibilities.
- ◆ Co-Sponsor of presentation by principal of Brummana High School, Mr. David Gray, at Friends Center.

- ◆ Three from Middle East Collaborative are regularly participating with Christian-Jewish Allies for a Just Peace for Israel/Palestine. Two or three are frequently joining the monthly zoom meeting of Quaker Palestine Israel Network. -- QPIN. Others are regularly attending protests including Fridays at Fetterman's and Mondays at McCormick's.

**What are the things that are stopping/hindering your mission, if any?**

- ◆ The enormity of the tragedy of the Gaza genocide.
- ◆ Plenty of other worthwhile issues to which Friends might – and do-- attend.
- ◆ Congresspersons fear backlash from specific elements of their constituencies if they are to support legislation sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, or Lebanon, or Iran, or Yemen.
- ◆ The issues of justice with equity through non-violent resolutions to bring improvements – concrete movements toward peace-- in the Middle East region seem overwhelming and distant, if not impossible, to many. I suspect that learned helplessness restricts the participation of many.

**Is there anything you need of PYM administration (from PYM staff, the Clerk(s) or the Program Committee?)**

Claire Kinnel has been wonderful. We appreciate the faithful participation of Sue Dietz.

Thank you all,  
Sandy Rea  
Clerk, Middle East Collaborative