



Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine Implementation Report July 2019

The "[Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine](#)" resolution passed by the Mennonite Church USA delegate body in 2017 has given focus and encouragement to MC USA constituents, congregations and agencies. Building on our long history of working for a just and peaceful end to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the resolution has encouraged us to sustain our efforts and enlarge our vision of what is necessary for peace.

Implementing the resolution is a task that belongs to the entire church. The Mennonite Church USA Israel-Palestine Working Group—comprising representatives from Mennonite Mission Network, Everence, Mennonite Central Committee U.S., The Peace and Justice Support Network, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Mennonite Palestine Israel Network, and others—supports the implementation of this resolution. Jonathan Brenneman previously served as Coordinator for Israel/Palestine Partners in Peacemaking. Andre Gingrich Stoner previously provided leadership to both the working group, and coordinator position.

The implementation of the resolution centers on the seven concrete commitments stated in the resolution. These commitments are being implemented by a variety of organizations and individuals at all levels of MC USA. Below is a list of the steps taken since July 2017. This list isn't exhaustive but is illustrative of a church striving to follow Jesus, doing the hard work peacemaking requires, and addressing a complex conflict with integrity and compassion.

We thank God for this church. Together, we will continue to work and pray for peace and justice for Israel and Palestine.

-Mennonite Church USA Israel-Palestine Working Group

Partnering with Palestinian and Israeli Peacemakers

- MC USA renewed the Israel/Palestine Partners in Peacemaking Coordinator volunteer service position in 2018. Jonathan Brenneman served in that role.
- "Rejoice!" Spring 2018 edition included prayers for peacemaking partners written by Jonathan Brenneman.
- Western District Conference has, in response to the resolution, created an Israel Palestine task force to build partnerships locally, and keep the conference informed.

- During February 2018, Mennonite mission workers in Israel and South Korea collaborated on an exchange visit between conscientious objectors to military service, helping faith communities in both countries recognize and challenge the hyper-militarized culture dominating both societies.
- Mennonite Central Committee U.S. continues to support the activities of various Palestinian and Israeli organizations working for peace.
- The Mennonite Palestine Israel Network (MennoPIN) wrote a chapter on home demolitions in the Sabeel Jerusalem book, Kumi Now. Sabeel is a Christian voice for peace in Palestine.
- Christian Peacemaker Teams continues to partner with Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers in the West Bank.
- In the Old City of Hebron, CPT works alongside the Palestinian groups Human Rights Defenders and the Hebron Defense Committee, both of whom mobilize people to engage in non-violent resistance to the occupation.
- Mennonite Mission Network workers in Israel are active in projects that bridge ethnic divides.
- Mennonite Mission Network workers are active in building cell churches and larger congregations that include both Arab and Jewish believers.
- Mennonite Mission Network and workers are active in bridging religious lines. Nazareth Village offers a non-dogmatic experience of Jesus' words in a first century Jewish village environment to visitors who come from around the world and next door: Christians, Muslims, Jews, and others. Local Muslim schools bring children to learn about their cultural heritage.

Understanding the Realities of Occupation

- MennoMedia has made the Kairos study guides available in English and Spanish. Since July 2017, 530 English and 41 Spanish guides have been sold.
- MennoPIN continues to offer an online PDF of the study guide for free.
- MCC U.S. made available, for free, the "What is Palestine-Israel?" book.
- The Mennonite ran a story, "Q&A: On Jerusalem, United States policies and Mennonites" interviewing MCC and MC USA staff about Jerusalem.
- Western District Conference Task Force sent a letter to the conference in response to the US moving its embassy to Jerusalem.
- MennoPIN created a list of tours to Israel-Palestine for Mennonites interested in traveling there.
- Mennonite Central Committee U.S. continues to host several learning tours yearly to Israel-Palestine.
- MennoPIN is launching an "End the Gaza Siege" campaign with a Twinning project to link Mennonite congregations with churches, mosques, schools and hospitals in Gaza for relationships of mutual awareness and understanding.
- Mennonite Mission Network continues to encourage board members and other MCUSA contacts to participate in learning tours.

Engaging Christian Zionism

- MennoPIN is supporting an action by Friends of Sabeel North America engaging people at the Christians United for Israel (a major Christian Zionist organization) convention in Washington, DC in July 2019. Two steering committee members are participating in the activities.
- Mennonite Mission Network partners Nazareth Village and Bethlehem Bible College work in various ways to address Christian Zionism.

Advocating with the U.S. Government

- A delegation of MC USA leaders, including Mennonite Mission Network Executive Director Stanley Green, met with congressional offices in May 2018 to discuss issues in Israel-Palestine.
- Ervin Stutzman (while serving as Executive Director of MC USA) and Ron Byler (Executive Director of MCC U.S.) signed an open letter to Congress opposing anti-BDS legislation.
- Esther Koontz, an MC USA member in Kansas, refused to sign an oath that she would not participate in boycotts of Israel (or the Israeli occupation). Her resulting court case led to Kansas amending its law.
- Goshen College sponsored three students who participated in a Palestine Advocacy Day in 2018.
- Members of a Virginia Mennonite Missions learning tour met with their congressional representatives in summer 2018. A group from Eastern Mennonite Seminary had similar meetings in late July 2017.
- Since the resolution passed, the MCC U.S. Washington Office has signed nearly a dozen letters to the U.S. government and had about 120 meetings with Congress and the Administration related to Israel-Palestine. Eight action alerts have generated about 1,500 email messages to Congress.
- MennoPIN is joining forces with numerous peace and justice organizations to encourage the passage of the House of Representatives bill HR 2407, "Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Under Israeli Military Occupation Act".

Avoiding Economic Support for Occupation while Investing in Peace and Justice

- The Israel-Palestine Working Group convened two consultations, hosted by Everence, which included representatives from MCC, MMN, CPT, Mennonite Retirement Trust, Mennonite Education Agency, Everence and MennoPIN. These were reported on by MC USA. The consultations reviewed investment practices and featured discussions of financial implications arising from the conflict.
- A "Peace in Palestine and Israel" socially targeted portfolio was developed by Everence Trust Company to allow clients who so choose to avoid investing in companies with direct involvement in conflict in that region.
- Everence has contributed its experience and perspectives to an international effort to develop a new framework for assessing investment risk in conflict-affected areas, which would apply to the Middle East and other areas around the world.
- In concert with other faith-based investors, concerns for fairness, transparency, and the application of globally accepted human rights standards for companies operating in this region have been part of Everence's corporate engagement program for nearly a decade.
- Four congregations have signed Friends of Sabeel North American (FOSNA)'s HP-free churches campaign.

Strengthening Relationships with Muslim and Palestinian-American communities

- MC USA reported on David Shenk's invitation to national Muslim convention.
- Jonathan Brenneman led workshop about anti-Arab racism for Mennonite offices.
- EMU Center for Interfaith Engagement hosted a consultation on interfaith engagement in 2018 attended by representatives of MCC, MNN, MCUSA, EMM, and CPT.

- Four Goshen College students attended American Muslims for Palestine’s advocacy day in 2018.
- Rachele Lyndaker Schlabach of MCC’s Washington Office spoke to the American Muslims for Palestine conference in April 2019.

Examining the Legacy of Antisemitism

- The Mennonite Jewish Relations (MJR) Working Group is compiling resources for the broader church to be more informed about antisemitism.
- Glen Guyton (MC USA Executive Director) wrote an open letter of support and condolence to the Tree of Life synagogue.
- The MJR Working Group issued a statement condemning anti-Semitism in light of the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue.
- Mennonite Central Committee U.S. signed a statement by InterAction condemning discrimination and anti-Semitism in response to the Tree of Life shooting.

Building Relationships with Jewish Communities

- John Kampen, on behalf of MC USA, attended the National Council of Churches Christian-Jewish dialogue as an observer.
- MCC and MCUSA representatives attended a meeting of Jewish peace organizations in the US including: Americans for Peace Now, *T’ruah*, Foundation for Middle East Peace, Jewish Voices for Peace, and New Israel Fund.
- Ervin Stutzman sent a letter to conferences to, in accordance with the resolution, “commission at least one congregation to reach out to a local synagogue in their community to build relationships, listen deeply to their experiences, and learn from them.”
- The “Mennonite Jewish Relations Working Group” formed and began meeting in 2017. Comprised of MC USA constituents, pastors and agency representatives, the MJR Working Group works to support and encourage Mennonite relationships with Jewish communities.
- MJR Working Group began a mapping project of relationships between Mennonites and various parts of US Jewish communities.
- MC USA congregations are connecting with Jewish communities in their areas to build and strengthen relationships.

If there are activities you would like to see added to this report, please email Jason Boone (jasonb@mennontieusa.org)