



Report of the Middle East Collaborative of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions, 2024

To: Claire Kinnel, Melinda Wenner Bradley, Sue Dietz

Friends, The PYM Middle East Collaborative annual report below follows the same prompts as the document I prepared a year ago. I'm not sure whether this format is what was called for/expected for 2024, but here it is.

It has been a tremendously difficult year for those of us who love the region east of the Mediterranean Sea.

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

- PYM Middle East Collaborative is a group of Friends –mostly PYM Friends-- dedicated to learning about details behind current issues, developments, and opinions connected to the Middle East Region. Many in our group have spent time living in the Middle East. We historically have continued the connection begun at Yearly Meeting Sessions in 2002 with Ramallah Friends Meeting in Ramallah, PALESTINE.
- Together with Ramallah Friends School and Brummana High School outside of Beirut, LEBANON, we have direct connections to both the history and current events at each of these Quaker schools.
- The Hamas-Israel War of October 7, 2023 and since has brought challenges we've not faced in my tenure as Clerk of MEC. We share concerns, thoughts for our own advocacy for justice, and resources for learning new perspectives.
- While we spend a majority of our focus on search for a just peace in Israel/Palestine, we have also considered current situations in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, UAE, and Jordan.
- Beyond the Middle East Region itself, we examine ways that MEC members and PYM Friends might work here in the US in collaboration with local (e.g., American Friends Service Committee, Jewish Voice for Peace, Christian-Jewish Allies, Al Bustan Seeds of Culture) and national (e.g., Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends of Sabeel North America, Combatants for Peace, Quaker Palestine Israel Network) organizations.

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?

- Historically, our group has led workshops at PYM Annual Sessions.
- We have made our selves available to monthly and quarterly meetings for presentations. We invite Friends and non-Friends alike to join our presentations (both virtual and in-person.)
- Again in Winter 2024 three of us from Middle East Collaborative led virtual classes of the content Why Palestine Matters from the book of the same name published by Presbyterian Church USA.
- We have a website that is improved and expanded in the last year. Most notably in our expansion is a timeline of Quaker history in the Middle East <https://www.pym.org/middle-east-collaborative/timeline> The timeline itself has links to present day and historical resources.

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.
- Our first meeting after the beginning of the Hamas-Israel-Gaza war was a reflection and worship sharing format as Friends were so troubled by the steady news of the war’s atrocities. We saved more standard “business” for a briefer meeting in early December.

A report showing the requested budget vs actual expense

- We greatly appreciate the support of PYM in the form of supplying the collaborative with a modest budget.
- MEC was granted a working budget of \$1,500 in late October 2023. For the 2024 version of the Why Palestine Matters course in February and March 2024, the cost of the books was covered by the publisher. Mailing print copies of the book to registrants who requested same was/will be covered by that grant.
- We have not had occasion to grant honoraria to Speakers.
- To consider would be covering costs of tech support for speakers’ presentations.

- We'll have funds remaining to use in 2024-2025. Most helpful use of those remaining funds might be offering an honorarium to a guest speaker or supporting the travel of Friends to Middle East related events.

What are the major accomplishments for the year?

- Collaborative Fair display at Annual Sessions. Summer 2023
- Co-sponsored with Philadelphia Christian-Jewish Allies a talk at Friends Center by Phil Weiss, editor of Mondoweiss, an online newsletter looking at justice issues in Israel/Palestine. October 2023
- Co-sponsored with Central Philadelphia MM Peace and Social Concerns Committee a talk by Steve Chase of Friends Meeting of Washington DC. Steve had traveled to Palestine in June of 2023 and offered his perspectives including in light of the current war. January 2024
- Shepherded and mentored by our collaborators at Philadelphia Christian-Jewish Allies, three MEC Friends taught the content of the book *Why Palestine Matters*. Across seven evenings in February and March 2024, we hosted numerous guest speakers to present the issues of intersectionality, white supremacy, and injustices not only in Palestine but also as experienced by our African-American and Indigenous American neighbors. After a couple classes focusing on historical and current Gaza, we were able to shift the tenor of the last class in late March from informational to registrants' offering reflections and their own comments – all particularly in light of the (at that time) 51/2 month war in Gaza.
- (We have not ruled out offering the *Why Palestine Matters* course again in 2025.)
- At the invitation of Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting, two speakers from MEC provided both historical and personal perspectives on the Gaza war. May 2024
- Three of our members regularly meet (virtually and monthly) with Christian Jewish Allies for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine.
- Two of our members regularly meet (virtually and monthly) with Quaker Palestine Israel Network.
- Other MEC members have planned or traveled with groups that visit Israel / Palestine.
- For Quaker Timeline including link, see above.
- Through BRIEF REPORTS and DISCUSSION in our regular meetings, we are able to focus on news from Ramallah Friends School and Meeting, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and other countries.

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

- There are plenty of worthwhile, not Middle East related issues to which PYM Friends may give their attention and direct action efforts.
- 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?)

- Not that I think of right now. We very much look forward to working with Claire Kinnel.

Thank you all,

Sandy Rea

Clerk, PYM Middle East Collaborative