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Statement of The Peace Education Center calling on the United States to adopt an evenhanded approach to support a settlement of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians

As the world watches in horror as casualties and destruction mount daily in Israel, on the West Bank and in Gaza, the time has come for the United States government to confront the fundamental causes of the violence that have plagued Palestine since the creation of Israel in 1948 and since the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967. The current spate of violence between Palestinians and Israelis highlights the failure of Israel -- with the tacit and sometimes open approval of the United States -- to seriously negotiate with Palestinians by accepting their right to territorial integrity and national identity.

Under both Democratic and Republican leadership, the United States has turned a blind eye to Israel's suppression of Palestinian cries for justice, whether peaceful or violent, by supplying it with an endless array of military weapons; by acceding to domestic pressure to support Israel no matter whatever violent measures it commits against Palestinians; by supporting peace plans that give Israel everything and the Palestinians hardly even token relief; and, by shielding Israel from world pressure at international forums, like the United Nations.

Most recently, President Trump, under the biased orchestration of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, ignored evenhandedness in his so-called peace plan by giving Israel what it wanted, including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and by offering the Palestinians only some supposed economic aid in return. So far, President

Biden, in response to Israel's disproportionate use of force, has just stated that Israel has a "right to defend itself" without recognizing the right of Palestinians to struggle for their human rights in the face of Israeli intransigence to negotiate a just peace settlement.

The root cause of the current violence in Palestine stands as the failure of the right-wing Israeli government to negotiate in good faith with Palestinians either for some level of territorial and national integrity or for their inclusion in a bi-national state. Instead, this government believes it can restrain them forever in the confines of the Gaza Strip or in isolated pockets on the West Bank by brute military force with their meek acceptance of their fate. But as events show, there will never be peace without a just political settlement.

While the Peace Education Center condemns the use of violence by either side to resolve their conflict, we cannot ignore some real-world facts. One is the great disparity of force that can be utilized by Israel and by the Palestinians. Israelis have advanced American aircraft and sophisticated drones that can inflict sudden death at any moment. They have an army with modern weapons of ground war, including tanks, artillery, and skilled snipers who can openly shoot to maim or to kill at will. They also have nuclear weapons.

And what do the Palestinians have in contrast? The most sophisticated weapon they can muster are hundreds of small, homemade rockets, most of which an advanced Israeli air defense can shoot down before landing. They can also muster some assault rifles and bomb making material. Otherwise, on the open streets, Palestinian protesters can throw rocks or use slingshots. Sometimes, a few Palestinians can crack under the pressure of occupation and carry out individual acts of violence. The disparity in inflicting injury becomes obvious when you compare the death toll of Israelis and of Palestinians arising from their conflict: between 2008 and 2020, the United Nations has documented 251 Israeli deaths and 5,590 Palestinian deaths. The disparity in injuries is even greater.

While the Peace Education Center understands that Hamas and Palestinian leaders on the West Bank have not always acted wisely, we still must look at the overall responsibility for the current crisis. Although we call for Palestinians to adopt non-violent tactics to counter Israeli oppression, we cannot ignore certain realities. After years of relatively non-violent protest have offered no relief -- especially when the United States backs or

ignores Israeli actions at every crucial moment -- resort to violence may seem the only available path for justice. But non-violence can work only when your opponent has a moral core that can be activated by non-violent resistance. We call on the United States and Israel to offer the Palestinians a real non-violent path to justice by recognizing that Palestinians must be offered something substantial to establish their territorial integrity and national identity. Then calls for non-violent resistance can find fertile ground. We urge Hamas and leaders on the West Bank to be ready to suspend violence for good-faith negotiations even if their most ambitious goals do not look realistic in the short term.

WHAT MUST THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL DO NOW

As a first step, Israel must call for a ceasefire and, as an act of good faith, announce an immediate partial lifting of the Gaza blockade. The United States must adopt an evenhanded policy supporting a political solution to conflict. The most effective pressure that the United States can bring would be to withhold American military weapons from Israel and to use other points of leverage to immediately work for the following measures:

- Call on Israel to stop all forced displacement of Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah section of East Jerusalem and in all of the occupied Palestinian territories;
- Call on Israel to suspend the construction of Israeli settlements on the occupied territories;
- Call on Israel to lift the economic blockade on Gaza;
- The United States should stop opposing measures proposed in international bodies, like the United Nations, that criticize or penalize Israel for its human rights violations;
- The United States should support the right of Americans who oppose Israeli policies and actions to implement Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) measures;
- The United States should push Israel to enter into serious negotiations with the Palestinians with the expectation that a separate Palestinian entity or single bi-national state would emerge.

Adopted by the Board of the Peace Education Center of Greater Lansing on May 19, 2021