

Testimony for Hearing on Ohio HCR 10
April 17, 2018
Connie Hammond
166 Acton Road, Columbus, Ohio 43214

To: Senator LaRose

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to add some comments concerning HCR 10 based on recent developments.

On March 30, thousands gathered near the border of Gaza border as a peaceful protest to last through calling for the “right of return” for refugees and their descendants to ancestral homes in Israel. These demonstrations are planned to continue through May 15 when Palestinians commemorate the “Nakba” day marking the 1948 when more than 750,000 Palestinians were ejected or fled from some 450 villages that became the State of Israel. Today, there more than 7 million Palestinian refugees, defined as people displaced in 1948 and their descendants. A core Palestinian demand in peace negotiations is for justice for these refugees, most commonly in the form of the "right of return" as guaranteed under international law.

These peaceful protestors were met with indiscriminate sniper fire, killing to date 32 Palestinians including Hamas militants, civilians and a video reporter and injuring 363 by live fire and tear gas inhalation. It has been reported that the Israeli military is specifically targeting medics and reporters in Gaza. Some 450 children, 21 medics belonging to the Palestine Red Crescent Society and 15 journalists are among those who have been injured since 30 March, Amnesty International [stated](#) on midday Friday, as the third week of protests was set to begin. Nearly 350 of those injured may be temporarily or permanently disabled, according to the World Health Organization. At least four people have had leg amputations. (1,2)

This attack on peaceful protestors has been strongly condemned by sixteen U.S. churches and agencies in a statement issued on April 12 titled: **Right of Refugees, Right to Demonstrate Peacefully, Right to Dignity**. This document opposes the use of lethal weapons and force by the Israeli military, calls for an investigation into the deaths and injuries caused by the Israeli military, calls for the U.S. to support the rights of refugees and resume full funding of the UNRWA, and calls on the international community to insist on an end to the blockade of Gaza which has resulted in uninhabitable conditions for the people living there.

The signatories of this statement concur with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court who recently has said “Violence against civilians – in a situation such as the one prevailing in Gaza – could constitute crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (“ICC” or “the Court”), as could the use of civilian presence for the purpose of shielding military activities.... My Office will continue to closely watch the situation and will record any instance of incitement or resort to unlawful force. I urge all those concerned to refrain from further escalating this tragic situation.”

On April 16, The National Lawyers Guild also posted a statement that stated, “The National Lawyers Guild is shocked and outraged by the Israeli military’s recent slaughter of unarmed civilians peacefully protesting in Gaza during the “Great March of Return.” The NLG demands an end to the massive, uncritical diplomatic and financial support that the U.S. continues to provide Israel, enabling it to engage

in ongoing gross violations of Palestinian human rights with impunity. Furthermore, the NLG insists on the right to protest such inhumane policies, including those outlined in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement, despite attempts by US politicians to [criminalize it](#). (3)

And this is what they say: Far from being a “liberal democracy in a hostile neighborhood,” Israel has exposed itself as a rogue state. Its officials have made statements verging on support for genocide, such as the [recent comment](#) by Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman that there are “no innocent people in Gaza.” With the support of the U.S. government and U.S. politicians—both Republican and Democrat—it calls Palestinian armed resistance against the Israeli occupation forces “terrorism.” It labels as antisemitic the Palestinian attempt to launch a nonviolent boycott of Israel, on the model of the successful boycott against the South African apartheid regime.

“An occupied people have the right to resist their occupiers. It is time that the international community recognize that Palestinians must have the same rights as people everywhere to seek their national liberation to protest, and resist foreign occupation and colonial domination,” said Audrey Bomse, co-chair of the NLG International Committee’s Palestine Subcommittee.

"Until the U.S. ends its ongoing financial and diplomatic support of Israel which allow the state to continue its deadly policies with impunity, the U.S. government will continue to be complicit in everything Israel does."

The protests at the Gaza border have clearly demonstrated the brutality of the Israeli occupation and the blockade of Gaza. This is not a time to discouraging criticism of the state of Israel and the BDS movement on the campuses of Ohio’s colleges and Universities.

Please do not vote on this resolution or vote NO.

- 1) [The Guardian](#), One Palestinian killed and hundreds injured in Gaza protests. **More than 360 wounded by bullets and tear gas, in the third week of demonstrations. Accessed 4-17-18.**
- 2) [The Electronic Intifada](#), Israel targets reporters, medics in Gaza protests, Accessed 4-17-18.
- 3) NLG Condemns Israeli Military Attacks on Unarmed Civilian Demonstrators in the Gaza Strip. April 16, 2018. [Accessed online 4-17-18.](#)



Witness in Washington

From the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness

Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministries

Raising A Prophetic Voice through the Social Justice Policy of Presbyterians since 1946

Right of Refugees, Right to Demonstrate Peacefully, Right to Dignity A Statement of US Churches and Christian Agencies on Gaza

April 12, 2018

Friday, March 30, thousands of Palestinians participated in the first of several weeks of planned nonviolent demonstrations in Gaza near the fence with Israel. These demonstrations are expected to continue until May 15, when Palestinians mark Nakba (“catastrophe”) Day, remembering the 1948 displacement and dispossession of 750,000 Palestinians, and resulting in a Palestinian diaspora and a refugee population that today numbers over five million, including descendants. At the same time Israel will celebrate 70 years since its establishment on May 14, 1948.

More than 1.3 million of Gaza’s nearly 2 million people are refugees. The Gaza demonstrations are an assertion of Palestinian rights: the rights of refugees, the right to demonstrate peacefully against injustice, and the right to live in and with dignity, not under closed military confinement or blockade.

In the first week of demonstrations, at least 16 people were killed and, according to the International Committee for the Red Cross, approximately 1500 people required medical assistance, with approximately 800 injuries resulting from the use of live ammunition. Reports indicate that the firing came from the Israeli military in an indiscriminate manner. A group of [United Nations human rights experts](#)^[1] stated, “There is no available evidence to suggest that the lives of heavily armed security forces were threatened.” The United States stood by and allowed Israel to carry out these attacks without any public criticism or challenge. Such US complicity is a continuation of the historical policy of active support for Israel’s occupation and US disregard for Palestinian rights. This complicity builds resentment and damages US national security. Palestinian refugees have the right to return to their homes, and to compensation for loss of property, as laid out in UN General Assembly resolution 194.

As US churches and Christian agencies, we support the Palestinian people as they courageously stand up for their rights. We have worked in our own context in the cause of justice, peace, and equality, and continue to do so even as we recognize we have too often fallen short in these efforts. We reject the use of violence by individuals, groups or states. In the wake of demonstrations that have resulted in tragedy and death, and anticipating the continuation of Palestinian protests over the coming weeks, we cannot be silent.

- We oppose in no uncertain terms the use of violence against the protesters, especially the lethal use of weapons and force by the Israeli military, and call for it to end that practice. We support the call by B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, to Israeli soldiers to refuse orders to shoot when it said, "Soldiers must not be ordered to use lethal force other than in life-threatening situations. As a rule, demonstrations inside the Gaza Strip, approaching the fence or even sabotaging it, do not constitute such situations. ... [W]hen the government betrays its soldiers' trust and arms them with unlawful orders, we are here to remind not only of the rules of morality but also of legal requirements: **A patently unlawful order must not be obeyed.**"
- We call for an investigation into the deaths and injuries suffered resulting from the use of force.
- We concur with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court who recently has said "Violence against civilians - in a situation such as the one prevailing in Gaza - could constitute crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court ("ICC" or "the Court"), as could the use of civilian presence for the purpose of shielding military activities... My Office will continue to closely watch the situation and will record any instance of incitement or resort to unlawful force. I urge all those concerned to refrain from further escalating this tragic situation."
- We call upon the United States, and particularly President Trump and members of Congress, to censure the violent and indiscriminate actions of the State of Israel in response to the demonstrations which in no way threaten the security of the state or its citizens, and to hold Israel appropriately accountable, ensuring that US aid isn't used in ways that contravene established US and international laws, given the more than \$3 billion in military aid the US disburses to Israel annually.
- We call on the US to support the rights of refugees, including Palestinian refugees, based on international law and conventions, through the fora in which the US participates.
- In keeping with the imperative to support refugees' rights, we call upon the United States to resume its full funding of the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency (UNRWA) which supports schools, hospitals, and other essential services for Palestinian refugees. The US recently announced that it would provide \$60 million to UNRWA with no assurance of further funding for 2018. If the US provides no additional funds in 2018, this would mean an 83% funding cut over the 2017 contribution of \$365 million.

- We call upon the international community, including the US government, to insist on an end to the blockade of Gaza, which has resulted in uninhabitable conditions for the people there, including poverty and lack of sufficient access to clean water, food, medicine and medical supplies, electricity, fuel, and construction equipment. The United Nations [concluded as early as 2012](#)^[2] that Gaza was on track to be unlivable by 2020, and [noted in 2017](#)^[3] that the trends of deterioration had accelerated.

In demonstrating, Palestinians have sought to bring the world's attention to, and to recover, their rights – rights as refugees, to demonstrate, and to live in dignity. They have been met with an immediate and tragic rejection of those rights, but as people of hope, and in the season of Easter, we believe that those rights will ultimately prevail. In this time, we pray fervently, speak clearly, and act diligently in support of peace, justice, and equality.

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

National Council of Churches

Pax Christi International

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Reformed Church in America

The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

United Church of Christ

[1] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22924&LangID=E>

[2] <https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/publications/gaza/Gaza%20in%202020.pdf>

[3] https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gaza_10_years_later_-_11_july_2017.pdf

NLG Condemns Israeli Military Attacks on Unarmed Civilian Demonstrators in the Gaza Strip

Posted on [April 16, 2018](#)

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The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) is shocked and outraged by the Israeli military's recent slaughter of unarmed civilians peacefully protesting in Gaza during the "Great March of Return." The NLG demands an end to the massive, uncritical diplomatic and financial support that the U.S. continues to provide Israel, enabling it to engage in ongoing gross violations of Palestinian human rights with impunity. Furthermore, the NLG insists on the right to protest such inhumane policies, including those outlined in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement, despite attempts by US politicians to [criminalize it](#).

Last month, Palestinians in Gaza announced a plan to engage in six weeks of nonviolent protest, beginning on Land Day, March 30, and leading up to May 15, the 70th anniversary of the *Nakba* or "catastrophe" of 1948 when nearly 800,000 Palestinians were forced to leave their land to create Israel. The demonstration involved camping out in tents along the northern and eastern edges of the Gaza Strip to highlight Palestinians' right to return to their cities, towns, and villages from which they were expelled 70 years ago—one enshrined in international law and UN General Assembly Resolution 194. "It's been 70 years and no one is listening to us," said one elderly demonstrator. In response to declarations by organizers that participants would be unarmed and protests strictly nonviolent, Israeli officials threatened lethal force and deployed more than [100 snipers](#) to positions overlooking the areas where the encampments were planned. An estimated 30,000 Palestinian men, women and children participated on the first day of demonstrations. Despite the demonstrations remaining nonviolent, Israeli soldiers opened fire on the unarmed protesters, killing 17 and wounding over 1,400—750 of them with live ammunition.

Rather than condemn the manifestly illegal and immoral actions of the Israeli military, [the US blocked](#) a UN Security Council statement supporting the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully and endorsing the call by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for an [independent investigation](#). As of April 16, 34 unarmed Palestinian civilians have died—[including a journalist](#) conspicuously wearing a flak jacket marked PRESS—and more than 2,000 remain wounded and maimed from the attack.

The killing and wounding of peaceful civilian protesters despite no threat to the lives of Israeli soldiers is a violation of the most basic tenets of international human rights and humanitarian law, and the restrictions that these bodies of law place on the use of force. B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, [urged Israeli soldiers](#) to refuse the illegal command to shoot unarmed protesters and stressed that Israeli policy makers bear responsibility for issuing unlawful orders and their lethal consequences.

Indeed, Israel's leaders and their policies and conduct in the occupied Palestinian territory, specifically Gaza, must be [seriously investigated](#) by the International Criminal Court. As the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), to which the NLG is affiliated, noted [in a statement](#) denouncing the massacre, under the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#), an occupying power has a legal duty to protect the occupied civilian population. Instead, Israel has declared Gaza a "hostile entity" and has used this as a pretext to institute [inhumane policies](#) designed to punish its people. As a direct result of these deliberate policies, the UN has warned that Gaza will become "[unlivable](#)" by 2020. Far from being a "liberal democracy in a hostile neighborhood," Israel has exposed itself as a rogue state. Its officials have made statements verging on support for genocide, such as the [recent comment](#) by Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman that there are "no innocent people in Gaza." With the support of the U.S. government and U.S. politicians—both Republican and Democrat—it calls Palestinian armed resistance against the Israeli occupation forces "terrorism." It labels as antisemitic the Palestinian attempt to launch a nonviolent boycott of Israel, on the model of the successful boycott against the South African apartheid regime.

"An occupied people have the right to resist their occupiers. It is time that the international community recognize that Palestinians must have the same rights as people everywhere to seek their national liberation to protest, and resist foreign occupation and colonial domination," said Audrey Bomse, co-chair of the NLG International Committee's Palestine Subcommittee.

"Roughly 70% of Gaza's residents are refugees from towns and villages that were destroyed and/or depopulated by Israel in 1948 and 1967. They live only a few short miles from home but have never been allowed to return. When these imprisoned refugees decided to organize nonviolent demonstrations to try to draw the world's attention to their plight, Israel ordered its soldiers to open fire in blatant violation of international law. Were it any other country doing this, there would rightfully be swift condemnation and the imposition of sanctions," said Huwaida Arraf, co-chair of the NLG International Committee's [Palestine Subcommittee](#) and co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement.

Until the U.S. ends its ongoing financial and diplomatic support of Israel which allow the state to continue its deadly policies with impunity, the U.S. government will continue to be complicit in everything Israel does.

The National Lawyers Guild, whose membership includes lawyers, legal workers, law students and jailhouse lawyers, was formed in 1937 as the United States' first racially-integrated bar association to advocate for the protection of constitutional, human and civil rights.

Image: Palestinian protester injured by Israeli soldiers on March 30 (still via video footage from [Democracy Now!](#)).