An Open Letter to Hillary Clinton
July 12, 2016

As Quakers, we are disappointed in your opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and your unwavering support for the right wing government of the State of Israel, despite its unconscionable repression of the Palestinian people.

We understand that you think BDS stands in the way of peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. In your letter of May 9 to the Israel Action Network and the Jewish Federations of North America you explain that the movement aims to “punish” Israel by “dictating” how the two sides should resolve the core issues of the conflict. We respectfully disagree with this analysis. As you surely know, the balance of power has always been in Israel’s favor. Israel, a nuclear armed country with a modern military supported by $128 billion dollars in US aid since its founding, is pitted against smaller and smaller enclaves of Palestinians, now crowded into barely 15% of historical Palestine, harassed and dehumanized at checkpoints, deprived of work, food, water, building materials, travel, health care – everything that human beings should enjoy. The fact that Palestinian civil society has called for a powerful, nonviolent, international response to this untenable situation should be understandable.

As you may know, Quakers have been serving since the 1880s in Palestine, where we have had the opportunity to learn from and appreciate the Palestinian people, their culture, their work ethic, and their resilience in the face of suffering. We respectfully suggest that as someone who hopes to act as a fair negotiator, you should avail yourself of every opportunity to do the same.

You often reminisce that when you and Bill visited Israel for the first time three decades ago, you walked the ancient streets of Jerusalem’s Old City and fell in love with the country and its people. We believe you will be a better negotiator if you allow yourself to fall in love with the Palestinian people as well. It is not hard to do. Spend time with families, visit people’s homes, enjoy their magnificent hospitality, listen to their stories about their daily lives, learn a bit of Arabic, appreciate the humor, the children’s games and stories, the music, the beautiful embroidery, the olive harvest, the importance Palestinians place on education. Learn, too, about the terror so many have experienced, the physical and emotional trauma of scores of children, the displacement from their ancestral homes and villages, the erasure of their suffering from the eyes of Israelis on the other side of the “separation wall.”
We know this is not how diplomacy usually works. But we believe the world is ready for a new way of addressing human disagreements that result in violence and war. If you spend significant time experiencing the lives and perspectives not just of the Israelis, but of the Palestinians as well, you will be able to move negotiations forward in ways that both sides will ultimately see as fair.

As Quakers, we yearn for an end to this terrible conflict that has spawned such hard feelings between good people. We ask you to act with integrity in the critical work that you do.

Sincerely,
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Edward Morin (Michigan)
Ruth Zweifler (Michigan)
Anne Remley (Michigan)
Marilyn Churchill, MA (Michigan)
Karen Deslierres (Michigan)
Sara Koopman (Canada/Washington)
James Koopman (Michigan)
Ruth Carey (Michigan)
Steve Chase (Pennsylvania)
Maia Carter Hallward (Georgia)
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Elizabeth Block (Canada)
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Deborah Fink (Iowa)
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Marlena Santoyo (Pennsylvania)
Jim Best, MA, CCC-SLP
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Phebe McCosker (New Hampshire)
Dr. William B. Telfair (West Virginia)
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