

March 22, 2024

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President of the United States of America, Mr. Joe Biden,

In 2019, you said, *“America is an idea that is stronger than any army, bigger than any ocean, more powerful than any dictator or tyrant. It gives hope to the most desperate people on earth. It guarantees that everyone is treated with dignity and gives hate no safe harbor.”* I applaud your moral clarity and invite you to urgently reimagine what we must be doing differently in Israel-Palestine to make that statement ring true. But first I want to briefly introduce you to the remarkable university that I serve.

Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) is proud to contribute mightily to the economic, cultural and spiritual vitality of our city (“the friendly city” of Harrisonburg, VA), region (Shenandoah Valley) and beyond. Our alums serve as “salt and light” in nearly every corner of the globe.

In our 106-year history, we have forged an identity as a Christian-Anabaptist peace and justice university. Mennonite educators, peacebuilders, and missionaries who are part of the larger Mennonite World Conference (MWC) have for many decades been committed to working with partners in both Israel and Palestine to bring forth a just peace. At EMU, we regularly send students and faculty to the Middle East for extended intercultural learning. Faculty with connections to our [Seminary](#), the [Center for Justice and Peacebuilding](#) and the [Center for Interfaith Engagement](#) have spent years in both countries and resource our campus here at home through the curriculum, special lectures and workshops, and lead trips to the Holy Land for our students, alumni and friends. EMU is the alma mater of many actively working for peace in our world today, including [Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee](#) of Liberia.

In fact, just last summer we had a student group studying in Israel and Palestine for six weeks. Since the atrocities erupted in Israel-Palestine on October 7, our students have been leading the way as “living epistles” of Jesus’ courageous call to nonviolence, on campus, in the community, and on Capitol Hill.

On March 19, 2024, we released [A Path Forward: EMU’s Statement on Israel-Palestine](#), after much thoughtful engagement with our many stakeholders here and around the globe.

“Six months into the Israel-Palestine tragedy that has further descended from chaos to an international humanitarian crisis, we say:

We condemn all violence against the tens of thousands of precious, innocent lives lost in this critical moment. We believe it is imperative that U.S. policymakers take measures to immediately de-escalate the indiscriminate violence to prevent the further loss of civilian life. We urge Congress and the Presidential Administration to:

- *Call for a significant humanitarian pause—including a ceasefire in Gaza—to save lives.**
- *Prioritize and protect all civilians, securing humanitarian aid into Gaza and working to secure the release of all hostages; and**
- *Urge all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law.**

The significant loss of life, as well as torture, abuse, and mass starvation occurring among innocents—mostly women and children—are war crimes. This is unconscionable. The United States cannot remain complicit in violating international law while, at the same time, calling itself the beacon of human rights and freedom.”

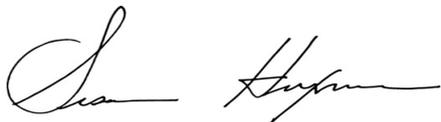
We know “statements” can be fraught with challenges. And yet, taken together (as more and more schools, churches and non-governmental organizations cry out to stop the violence), they can “speak truth to power.” Or, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. so famously said, such collective words and deeds can become a mighty force. Indeed, “justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

We implore you, Mr. President, as our distinguished head of state, commander-in-chief, and strong man of faith, to be a persistent champion of the above actions for peace. We are at a moral crucible. Can we count on your bold and courageous leadership? Our statement is modeled on the Friends Committee of National legislation (FCNL.org) statement involving 70 interfaith organizations, nongovernmental agencies and schools, including Christian, Muslim, Arabic and Jewish groups.

We will continue to hold you, Mr. President, and our campus community in prayer, including EMU alumni and supporters who live and work and have family members in the Middle East, particularly in Israel and Palestine.

Hear our prayers and our petitions, O merciful God.

Sincerely,



Susan Schultz Huxman, Ph.D.
President
Eastern Mennonite University