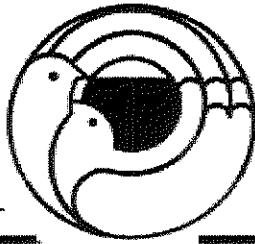


January  
2024

Vol. 59 No. 1



Newsletter of **LEPOCO**  
Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

## The Israel-Hamas War Evolves

As we begin 2024 and the fourth month of the war between Israel and Hamas, some things have changed, some have remained the same. The relentless Israeli assault on the Gaza strip continues. The Palestinian death toll is now well over 23,000 (not counting those still buried beneath the rubble). Of these, the vast majority are civilians, not Hamas fighters. Perhaps 70% are women and children. In short, the slaughter of the innocents goes on.

Additionally, Gaza continues to confront a mounting humanitarian crisis, predictable from the time Israel announced a "complete siege" of the Gaza strip in the immediate aftermath of Hamas's sudden and brutal attack on southern Israel on October 7. Prior to that date, Gaza was already dependent on humanitarian aid. Israel's cutting off deliveries of water, food, fuel, has produced a terrible and mounting disaster, with civil society on the verge of collapse. Israel's continuing airstrikes and artillery fire have now displaced about 85% of Gaza's pre-war population of 2.3 million. Most are now sheltering in the South, in an area Israel once declared as safe but which has since come under attack. The U.N. humanitarian chief recently announced that as a result of Israel's assault the Gaza strip has become "uninhabitable."

Other aspects of the war show signs of change. The threat of a wider, regional war is growing. Conflict between Israel and Hezbollah on Israel's northern border has intensified, and Israel is carrying out targeted strikes in Beirut and in Syria. Israel's defense minister recently announced that Israel is conducting a war on seven fronts! U.S. forces in the region are also conducting operations against Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria as well as in the Red Sea.

In perhaps the biggest shift, however, the U.S. is finally attempting to distance itself somewhat from what Israel is up to. U.S. officials have repeatedly urged Israel to be less indiscriminate in its bombing campaign. World opinion seems to be slowly forcing the U.S. to push for a reduction in the intensity of the conflict, if not for a ceasefire. Israel has withdrawn part of its forces from Gaza. However, Prime Minister Netanyahu, in part for reasons of his personal political survival, foresees a war that will continue for "many more months."

There is also a major difference in what Israel and the U.S. envision when the war ends. Some of Netanyahu's declared goals at the outset of the war were clearly impossible - Israel could never hope to achieve the complete eradication of Hamas, let alone

the recently declared aim of the "deradicalization" (whatever that might mean) of the Palestinian people. More fundamentally, once the war ends, the U.S. would like to see the Palestinian Authority assume control of Gaza. Israel opposes the restitution of Palestinian governance in any form. The U.S. clings to the hope of an eventual two-state solution as the only path to peace. The government of Israel opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Perhaps the U.S. now seeks distance between itself and Israel in part because Israel's military operations have begun to raise accusations of genocide. South Africa has launched a formal complaint at the International Court of Justice charging Israel with committing genocide in Gaza. On January 3, 2024, a group of prominent Israelis also accused their country's judiciary of ignoring blatant incitement to genocide by major public figures, including those in the government. They decried explicit calls to commit atrocious, genocidal crimes against millions of Palestinians in language that has become a regular part of Israeli discourse.

Active citizens in the U.S. should do all that they can to pressure our government to stop arming Israel, to avoid enlarging the war, and to bring about an immediate ceasefire.

~ Mick Baylor

LEPOCO Gathering

Remembering & Honoring

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Saturday, January 27, 3 pm**

**"Staying the Course of Nonviolence"**

Lehigh Valley Friends Meeting

4116 Bath Pike, Bethlehem

(Route 512, ½ mile north of Route 22)

Public Invited to a program of reflection:

Readings, Poetry, Music

If you would like to participate as a reader or  
for more information contact LEPOCO

610-691-8730 [lepoco@fast.net](mailto:lepoco@fast.net)

# Acting for Peace! Ceasefire Now!

## Vigiling Every Week

Weekly, since early November, a steady group of a dozen or more people have been taking their places on the four corners of Wyandotte and Third streets, in south Bethlehem, holding signs that call for a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza, asking for humanitarian aid to all who are suffering in the war-torn regions, and asking that passersby call their congresspeople - to request that they support all actions toward these goals.

LEPOCO has been meeting on these four corners, on the second Thursday of every month, for many years. Given the alarming number of countries currently affected by actions of war, LEPOCO's Stop the Wars Committee decided to extend these vigils to be on a weekly basis, indefinitely. My hope is that when these vigils end, it will be because our hurting world is finally experiencing Peace.

Please join us every Thursday, at the south end of the Hill-to-Hill Bridge, in Bethlehem, 3:30-4:30 pm (as the days get longer, this time is likely to be a little later). You are welcome to bring your own signs, but there are usually extras available. For more information, please call the LEPOCO office at 610-691-8730.

~ Amanda Zaniesienko

## Speaking to Congress

On December 21, the Peace, Justice and Sustainability Network, an associate of the Peace Action Network, conducted a virtual interview with Augustin Jones, a member of Senator Bob Casey's staff, to talk about the senator's stance on the conflict in Israel and Gaza. Several organizations were represented. I represented LEPOCO on the call.

It was agreed that Sen. Casey is unlikely to call for a ceasefire in Gaza. While continuing to make the argument for a ceasefire, the group also looked for a position that Sen. Casey could support, namely, the Sen. Van Hollen amendment to the proposed supplemental funding bill, which requires that military assistance for other countries paid for by U.S. taxpayers be used in a manner consistent with U.S. law, international humanitarian law, and the law of armed conflict, and Senate Resolution 504, Sen. Bernie Sanders' resolution that requires a report on Israel's human rights practices and U.S. military aid to Israel.

LEPOCO had already signed a letter in support of the Van Hollen amendment that was sent to Senator Casey and Senator John Fetterman. The letter stressed the urgency of ensuring that U.S. weapons to Israel are not being used in violation of both U.S. and international law. Since October 7, Israel's attacks against 2.3 million Palestinians, including one million children, in the Gaza Strip have killed over 20,000 Palestinians, including over 10,000 children.

~ Janet Ney

## Demonstrating in Allentown

Carol and Mick Baylor and I attended a Gaza Solidarity Demonstration on December 22, outside Rep. Susan Wild's office in the Federal Building at 5<sup>th</sup> & Hamilton Streets, Allentown. The Demonstration was sponsored by groups including The Muslim Students of the Lehigh Valley, and a new group called My Lehigh Valley. The gathering was very diverse with lots of Palestinian flags and signs. We also met attendees from Democratic Socialists of America, Jewish Voice for Peace, and Food Not Bombs (they provided a table with refreshments).

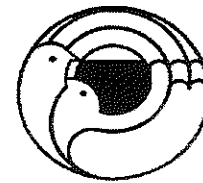
I estimate between 75 and 95 people participated. There were lots of signs, and many people brought letters addressed to Rep. Wild, written about Gaza, urging her to support a ceasefire.

At the beginning the doors to the Federal Building were open, and some of us were able to deliver our letters to the guards, for Rep. Wild's mailbox. The leaders of the demonstration said they had been trying for weeks to get a meeting with Rep. Wild.

After the young people at the demonstration crowded around the front of the building outside the doors, the guards would no longer take the letters. It was troubling to me that the door our taxes paid for was closed by guards with guns, even though it was supposed to be open until closing. The letters the guards refused to accept were mailed to Rep. Wild.

We made lots of contacts and invited people to join us for the weekly Hill-to-Hill Bridge Peace Vigils calling for a ceasefire in the war.

~ Kathryn Hoffman



Newsletter of LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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The LEPOCO Newsletter is published eight times a year by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern, a nonviolent, non-profit organization dedicated to peace in all forms.

### Annual dues are:

Regular Member ..... \$35

Limited Income Member ..... \$10

Household Membership ..... \$45

Supporting Member ..... \$75

Articles/news should be submitted to one of the addresses above for consideration for the next issue of the newsletter.

Newsletter Staff: Tom Stinnett, Nancy Tate, Amanda Zaniesienko, Carol Baylor, Janet Ney, Rick Dow.

Thanks to all the people who collate and prepare the newsletter for mailing each month.

LEPOCO Steering Committee: Pam Brubaker, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Mohammed Khaku (ex-officio), Monica McAgdon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Stefan Rogers, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

## Three Voices From/About Israel-Gaza

### Birds No Longer Grace Gaza's Sky

by Batoul Mohamed Abou Ali

I adore the blue sky and white clouds over Gaza.  
Gaza! City of beauty, creativity, dignity, rebellion,  
strength, determination, steadfastness, ambition and  
triumph.  
Gaza! City of agony, bitterness, humiliation, waste,  
displacement, and both physical and psychological  
disrepair.  
In Gaza, the sky's color triggers memories.  
Israel's genocidal violence in Gaza started on 7 October.  
Until today, we have experienced every form of  
torment.  
Even the sky has been changed, its color speaks of pain.  
It is never pure any more, only adorned with rockets,  
missiles and artillery shelling.  
Birds still fly across the sky, but those that have not  
been killed, fly free of Gaza due to the merciless  
Israeli occupation.  
Missiles are thrown everywhere without  
discrimination. Babies are murdered, men  
wounded, and women carry their constant sorrow in  
their eyes.  
Even the cars seek refuge under our clothes or behind  
our houses.  
A boy and a cat find solace in each other's company in a  
temporary shelter in Khan...

(Source: Peace & Planet News, 12/20/23. Originally published by  
"The Electronic Intifada.")

### If Jesus Is Under the Rubble, Where Are We?

"A statement from MCC U.S. & MCC Canada"

"The cost in human lives right now is just astro-  
nomic," says Rachel Beitarie, Director of Zochrot, an  
Israeli Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partner. It  
brings unfathomable misery to Gaza, but beyond Gaza,  
as well, to all Palestinians and Israelis as well in this  
mindset of revenge and militaristic power... This is  
what brought us to October 7. And to all the violence  
that we experienced. So, we must choose a different  
path."

Beitarie went on to urge, "When you stand in  
solidarity with Palestinians, when you hold your  
governments accountable, you are not against Jews,  
you're not against Israeli Jews. You're doing this for us  
as well, for our safety, for our future."

(Source: Excerpt from longer statement from MCC U.S. & MCC  
Canada.)

### We Cannot Cross Until We Carry Each Other

by Puerto Rican Jewish poet & activist Aurora Levins  
Morales in the poem "Red Sea."

We cannot cross until we carry each other,  
all of us refugees, all of us prophets.  
No more taking turns on history's wheel,  
trying to collect old debts no-one can pay.

The sea will not open that way.

This time that country  
is what we promise each other,  
our rage pressed cheek to cheek  
until tears flood the space between,  
until there are no enemies left,  
because this time no one will be left to drown  
and all of us must be chosen.  
This time it's all of us or none.

(Source: This poem closes a longer piece by Arielle Angel, editor-in-  
chief of "Jewish Currents." The longer piece was published in mid-  
October and appeared in many online publications.)

## Backing Away from Nuclear Disaster & Funding the Military Industrial Complex

Back from the Brink reports that 43 members of the  
House of Representatives have cosponsored H. Res. 77  
that was introduced by Rep. Jim McGovern and Rep.  
Earl Blumenauer. H. Res. 77 calls on the U.S. to em-  
brace the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the  
Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), lead global  
efforts to work with all nuclear weapons states to  
abolish all nuclear weapons and adopt policies to  
prevent nuclear war. (See [www.preventnuclearwar.org](http://www.preventnuclearwar.org).)

The 43 cosponsors of H. Res. 77 include represen-  
tatives from many states, but none from Pennsylvania.  
LEPOCO is one of the 154 local, state and national  
organizations that have signed a letter urging Congress  
to advance policies to reduce nuclear risks by cospon-  
soring H. Res. 77. Individuals are urged to call or write  
Congress for the same purpose. Call your representa-  
tive at 202-224-3121 (the congressional switchboard). Get  
an address online or call LEPOCO (610-691-8730).

The war in Ukraine and the Israel-Gaza war both  
involve countries with nuclear weapons. With global  
tensions high, the risk of accidental or intentional use  
of nuclear weapons is greater than ever according to the  
Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock.

January 22<sup>nd</sup> marks the third anniversary of the  
entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of  
Nuclear Weapons. Ninety-three countries have signed  
the Treaty and 70 countries have ratified it. This anni-  
versary month is an especially important time to show  
support for the H. Res. 77 by contacting Congress.

Our leaders (with much encouragement from the mili-  
tary industrial complex - MIC) seem to see war, not  
diplomacy, as the solution. Jeffrey Sachs recently re-  
ported that Pres. Biden's 2024 military budget will  
reach at least \$1.5 trillion in outlays for the Pentagon,  
CIA, homeland security, non-pentagon nuclear arms  
programs, subsidized foreign weapons sales, other  
military-linked outlays and interest payments on past  
war-related debts. An additional \$50 billion is sought  
in "emergency supplemental funding" for our "defense  
industrial base" to keep shipping munitions to Ukraine  
and Israel. Is this spending obscene?

- Nancy Tate

# The Struggle Shared

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*"Institutions are powerful but are nothing when challenged by the collective power of outraged citizens. Be outraged!"*

- Noam Chomsky

---

*Starting in the late 1970's, Jeff Vitelli faithfully shared all sorts of peace and justice issues in a LEPOCO Newsletter column called "The Struggle Shared." The column reflected Jeff's deep devotion to LEPOCO and our commitment to nonviolence in the world. Jeff's final column was written in late 2022, before he became ill. Jeff died in August 2023. Fondly remembering Jeff, we want to continue the column with the same name. We think that Jeff would encourage us to do so.*

## BURNING TIRES & BITCOIN -

Bitcoin is a cryptocurrency; that is, as a medium of exchange it exists electronically. It is a virtual purchasing mechanism. Producing bitcoin requires bitcoin mining, a lengthy process too difficult to explain here. For anyone concerned about the environment, bitcoin mining is extremely harmful both in the excessive use of electricity and in greenhouse gas emission.

"With hundreds of thousands or more computers churning out guesses, Bitcoin is thought to consume 707 kWh per transaction. In addition, the computers consume additional energy because they generate heat and need to be kept cool." (Rene Cho, "State of the Planet," Columbia Climate School.)

Burning Tires? Panther Creek Power Operating LLC. operates a power plant in Nesquehoning, Pennsylvania. Panther Creek is owned and operated by Stronghold Digital Mining Inc, a bitcoin producer. Panther Creek has asked for Pennsylvania regulatory approval to burn tires to generate electricity to support their bitcoin production.

In late December, the DEP convened a public meeting in Carbon County during which local people expressed their opposition to the

Panther Creek Power proposal. The Pennsylvania Clean Air Council noted the seven citations Panther Creek has received for air pollution since 2021.

According to Times News of Lehigh, Panther Creek is burning tire shreds in an experiment to test the environmental impact. Residents of the area are being asked to report if they detect the pungent odor of tires burning. A DEP report is anticipated sometime in the future.

Among the environmental groups opposing the application to burn tires are: Save Carbon County ([www.savecarboncounty.com](http://www.savecarboncounty.com)), the Clean Air Council ([www.cleanair.org](http://www.cleanair.org)) and Penn Future ([www.pennfuture.org](http://www.pennfuture.org)).

DEATH PENALTY - On November 17, 2022, the State of Alabama tried to administer the death penalty to a prisoner named Kenneth Smith. The executioners tried to kill Smith by lethal injection, but they could not establish the intravenous line despite an hourlong effort. The state has now established a new execution date of January 25, 2024. This time, the executioners will pioneer a new experimental method by inflicting "nitrogen hyposia" also known as applying the "gas chamber" method. The prisoner will be in a sealed face mask and nitrogen gas will replace oxygen; he will smother to death. This procedure was developed because of the failure of other measures to kill. To learn more about efforts to abolish the death penalty, go to [www.deathpenaltyaction.org](http://www.deathpenaltyaction.org).

GREENING HAITI - The Quixote Center conducts reforestation efforts in Haiti. In the Arrondissement of Gros Morne, the non-profit has worked with local farmers for more than thirty years. In that time, hun-

dreds of thousands of trees have been planted.

According to a Quixote Center release, "...the community planted 16,000 fruit trees...and 800 families planted plantain trees." Their work with the farmers is extensive as they also provide seeds and education programs.

Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. An aerial view reveals a healthy green countryside on the Dominican side and a discouraging brown landscape on the Haitian side. Quixote is working to reverse the devastation of deforestation.

The Quixote Center works with the people of the Americas with the hope of improving economies, assisting immigrants and advocating for US immigration policies that are just. It takes its inspiration from the precepts of liberation theology and Catholic Social Teaching. The Center has been working in Haiti, a program it calls Haiti Reborn, since 1991. To follow the Center's work in Haiti, see "Haiti Reborn" at [www.quixote.org](http://www.quixote.org).

ACTIVIST NUNS - A group of four Catholic nuns, who collectively own more than 1000 shares of Smith & Wesson stock, has used its status as stockholders to sue the company for activities of the company. Specifically, they contend that the production, marketing, and sale of AR-style rifles have put shareholders at risk.

The lawsuit asks Smith & Wesson to return to its previous practices when it advocated for responsible gun ownership and did not produce assault weapons such as the AR rifles that have been implicated in high profile mass shootings.

The nuns are from Adrian Dominican Sisters in Adrian, Mich.; the Sisters of Bon Secours USA in Marriottsville, Md.; the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Aston, Pa.; and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, U.S.-Ontario Province in Marylhurst, Ore.

- Janet Ney

# Bits & Pieces

LEPOCO Peace Singers are rehearsing to sing for the Annual Gathering in April. We would welcome others to join us. We rehearse on Sunday evenings usually. Please contact LEPOCO (610-691-8730) for more information or to get on the email list for the Singers.

The Stop the Wars Committee is still seeking readers for the **Martin Luther King peace witness program** on January 27<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to learn more or sign up to read, please contact LEPOCO (610-691-8730).

The LEPOCO Book Group will have their first meeting of 2024 on Tuesday, February 6, at 6 pm, at the LEPOCO Peace Center, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem (18018), enter at the rear door with the sunflower painting. The book to read for the February meeting is "Lessons in Chemistry," by Bonnie Garmus. Alwyn Eades will lead the discussion. A complete reading list for 2024 is enclosed with this newsletter.

"State of Deception: Fact Finding Report on the Detained El Salvador Water Defenders, Mining, and the State of Human Rights under the Bukele Administration," is a new publication from the Institute for Policy Studies. The report was the result of an eight-person delegation to El Salvador that included academics and national organizations like the Institute for Policy Studies. Two members of the delegation, Robin Broad and John Cavanagh had co-authored "The Water Defenders: How Ordinary People Saved a Country from Corporate Greed," in 2021. This is an important report that can be read online by searching by the title of the report.

The exhibit, "Joan Baez: Musician & Artist," will be at the Martin Guitar Museum, 510 Sycamore St., Nazareth, through April 30. It presents a journey through Baez's work, her early interest in the arts and her

impact on popular music, civil rights, the anti-war movement and humanitarian causes. The exhibit includes some of her instruments, original paintings and drawings by Baez, rare photographs, tour memorabilia, and more. See [www.martinguitar.com](http://www.martinguitar.com) for more information. The exhibit is open 9 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Admission is free, but a \$5 donation to the Martin Guitar Charitable Foundation is invited. To confirm that the museum is open, call 610-759-2837.

The Essentials Café is now open at 41 East Third St., Bethlehem, next to West Side Moravian Church. It is the first pay-what-you-can café in the Lehigh Valley (as far as can be determined). The café is open 8 am to 11 am, for breakfast, and 11 am to 2 pm, for lunch, daily Tuesday through Saturday. It is led by a group of seven Moravian women. There are two paid cooks, otherwise the café is run by volunteers. The café is part of the One World Everybody Eats organization. You can learn more at [www.essentialscafe.org](http://www.essentialscafe.org).

The Center for Biological Diversity and other environmental groups are leading a campaign to get the Coca-Cola Company, the world's largest seller of consumer-facing plastics to **return to being a leader in refillable bottles**. Coca-Cola gutted their refillable bottle program between the 1950s and 1970s. You can sign a petition for this effort at [www.actbiologicaldiversity.org](http://www.actbiologicaldiversity.org).

LEPOCO signed a petition to "Stop Military Colonization of Okinawa," in early January. The petition was addressed to President Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and urged a halt to the construction of another massive U.S. air and naval base in Okinawa. The petition was initiated by Stop Military Colonization of Okinawa, and circulated by the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security. Joseph Gerson of the Campaign describes the Stop Military Colonization of Okinawa as "the world's longest and most inspiring nonviolent struggle for freedom, peace, and self-determination in the face of military

colonialism." If you would like to sign the petition as an individual, the easiest route online is to search for it by the title of the petition.

Anti-corruption activist **Bernardo Arévalo** was sworn in as Guatemala's president early on January 15, after months of fierce opposition from the nation's right-wing political establishment. Progressive campaigners and other leaders in Central America decried the obstruction as a coup attempt. The inauguration had been scheduled for January 14, but the proceedings were delayed as conservative legislators stonewalled efforts to select new congressional leadership. The delay was part of a sustained push by the right-wing forces to derail the transfer of power. It sparked fury in the streets with Arévalo supporters (including indigenous groups and the country's youth) mobilizing as it appeared that the president-elect's opponents were launching a last-ditch attempt to stop him from taking office. Government officials from other Latin American nations expressed alarm over the delay and issued a statement that "the will of the Guatemalan people must be respected."

After his inauguration the new president "visited the site outside the attorney general's office where indigenous protesters had kept vigil for more than three months, demanding authorities respect the vote" and that the former president step down. Arévalo said in his inaugural address, "There cannot be democracy without social justice, and social justice cannot prevail without democracy."

(Source: [commondreams.org](http://commondreams.org), 1/15/24)

Check out the LEPOCO website at [www.lepoco.org](http://www.lepoco.org) for a Calendar of Events, Newsletter Archive...

Sign up for LEPOCO e-mail weekly updates by calling 610-691-8730, or by writing to [lepoco@fast.net](mailto:lepoco@fast.net).

Follow LEPOCO on Facebook & Twitter. Please "like" and "share," often.



Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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**See Inside:**

Page 1

- Israel-Hamas War Evolves
- Gathering Honoring MLK

Page 2

- Acting for Peace (Three examples)

Page 3

- Three Voices From/ About Israel-Gaza
- Backing Away from Nuclear Disaster

Page 4

- The Struggle Shared

Page 5

- Bits & Pieces

Insert

- Book Group 2024 Reading List



**“Staying the Course of Nonviolence”**

**Saturday, January 27, 3 pm**

**Readings, Poetry, Music**

**Lehigh Valley Friends Meeting, Bethlehem**

**Remembering & Honoring The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**A LEPOCO Gathering**

*(See page 1 for more information.)*

**Weekly Peace Vigils** (Every Thursday)

Jan. 18 & 25; Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22, & 29

3:30-4:30 pm (time may move later as days get longer)

*Ceasefire Israel-Gaza war.*

*End the wars. Witness for peace.*

3<sup>rd</sup> & Wyandotte Sts., (south) Bethlehem

*(see page 2 for more information)*

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, for more info.

**Save the Date**

**LEPOCO**

**Annual Gathering**

**Saturday, April 6**

**4 pm**

**Featured Speaker:**

**The Rev. Dr. Chris Ney**