



## Ramallah Friends Meeting (Quakers)

### Advent Message 2016

#### **Saving Our Children, Freeing Ourselves**

**by Jean Zaru**

*"Today a savior has been born to you." Luke 2:11*

#### **Children of War**

Every day, in Palestine and throughout the Middle East, we seem to be talking about our children and the suffering they needlessly endure. Their plight lies heavy on our hearts and we worry about their future.

Our children are children of military occupation and they are children of war, whether they live in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq or elsewhere. They are often denied education and adequate medical care; they are imprisoned, tortured, left homeless and vulnerable to a host of social problems. Today, nearly half of the world's refugees are children and over one-third of the Arab World is under 14 years of age.

Our children wonder why we can no longer protect them. And we, the parents, extended family and caretakers, wonder out loud, "Do Middle Eastern children belong to a different God than does the rest of the world?"; "How can such horrors be tolerated?"



## The Will to Act with Compassion

Clearly, the facts are well known –and have been for some time. An abundance of research has been conducted and numerous reports issued on the status of Palestinian children. What is needed now is not more information; rather, what is required is the will to act and to do so with a strong sense of urgency. We certainly don't need any more info–graphics or fact sheets.

Our children cannot wait, for soon their childhood will be gone. At this juncture, what is required of us is a determined will to take immediate, effective action.

Facts are crucial, yet we must move beyond them with an equal measure of concern and compassion. For us to know and then to be moved is certainly an important first step. Yet, we risk becoming meaningless if we stop there, that is unless we are led to a concerted response.

Friends, if our knowledge is not touched by compassion, we will have no stake in what that knowledge reveals –nevertheless its consequences for the children of the world. We must completely and without hesitation own our responsibility to transform the lives of these vulnerable children and to do so today.

Are we tired and weary? Yes, we are! Fatigue invades our daily living. Are we barraged with too many crises to address? Yes, we are! Yet, one thing we can and must do is to find sources of strength to renew our spirits –lest we perish, along with our children and their futures.

### What can we do?

1. **Get involved in shaping the character of society.** Stop violence against children. Because children in Palestine feel powerless to end the military occupation, which is older than they are, they sometimes become part of a pattern of passing violence on from one to another.
2. **Demonstrate justice and nonviolence in the church.** Raise children in a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere. The church can and must model this, wherever you are.
3. **Organize institutions to meet immediate human need and stop militarism.** No amount of humanitarian aid will revive Palestine or Syria unless we

end militarism, occupation, and the military destruction of infrastructure, lives and livelihoods.

### Re-framing Salvation

We are told that with Jesus' birth a Savior is born and that Jesus saves. To save or to have salvation is not only a religious slogan. It has concrete meaning in our everyday living. It means "to be wide, to be spacious", physically, intellectually, and spiritually.

Jesus' salvation came to be used for rescuing people from danger and misfortune. Liberating those who are confined, giving freedom to creation and for people to be themselves as children of God who are all created equally.

No one is free who does not work for the freedom of others. Although, unfortunately, we sometimes act in exclusive ways rather than inclusive ways; we close ourselves off, rather than be liberated.

### More Prophets of Justice

In our work for salvation, we must always remember the thundering denunciation of injustices by the prophets who could not be silent any longer.

If you visit Palestine today, you will hear the cry of every Palestinian man, woman and child. A cry from the heart, demand for justice. The words of the prophets calling for justice could be our own words. They appear to be exact descriptions of our situations and our lives, and in the wilderness of occupation, oppression and exile, we need even more than the prophets of justice to proclaim the coming of the Prince of Peace.

*"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...See that you do not despise one of these little ones for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of God. So it is not God's will that one of these little ones should perish."*  
(Matthew 18:1-14)

## Transformation Through Nonviolence

It is imperative that we continue the struggle on all fronts. To resist is to be human, but only through nonviolence can we bring about transformation.

As Palestinians, we are usually either perceived as victims or as terrorists. Why are we not considered people in a genuine quest of our deserved freedom? We have endured repeated tragedies and ongoing trauma. Indeed, there is a need to condemn, to be sad, to express rage and anger; but we should not stop there.

We should create alternatives to what currently exists. We need to stir our collective imagination, spur new energies and creative powers in such a way that all are inspired to act and build new communities embedded in health and equality. And to do so urgently, for the sake of our children.

To celebrate the advent of the Prince of Peace, the greatest gift we can give to children of war and occupation is the new creation of a safe environment that will foster their creative expression, ongoing learning, spiritual growth, and sense of empowerment to be *changemakers*.

I hope our efforts will create the conditions necessary to empower our children to move from victims to creators of their own bright and beautiful futures. I pray we bring salvation here and now by creating wide and open spaces. And through this sacred space we might free ourselves to save the children, for unto us a child is born.



*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."*

Romans 15:13