Pennsylvania Council of Churches Statement on Escalating Violence in Israel/Palestine
(October 10, 2023)

"In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it... He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more." -Isaiah 2:2, 4

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches grieves over the extreme escalation of conflict in Israel and Palestine. We name – and cry out against – centuries of antisemitism and violence against our Jewish siblings. We also recognize the oppression of, and violence directed at, the Palestinian people: violence that, as reported by the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, has increased considerably in recent months. We affirm that violence can never end violence. Only a just peace can do that. The heinous attacks by Hamas only cause further suffering for all people on both sides of the conflict.

We unequivocally condemn the deadly attacks and kidnappings by Hamas against Israeli communities. We also express deep concern over Israel's violent retaliation, including a declaration of siege with intent to cut off access to food and water to the people of Gaza.

The land where this brutal conflict is occurring birthed three great Abrahamic religions. Followers of all three are caught up in - and suffering from - the violence. We call on the opposing forces to recognize their shared heritage as beloved children of God and to cease immediately the hostilities that grieve our common Lord. We call on the nations of the world to come together with determination to establish a just peace in the land; one that genuinely addresses Israel's needs for safety and security, and Palestinians' need for self-determination and freedom. Finally, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches calls on all people of good will to join us in prayer that terror, war, and hatred may cease, and peace may come quickly so that all may flourish as God intends.