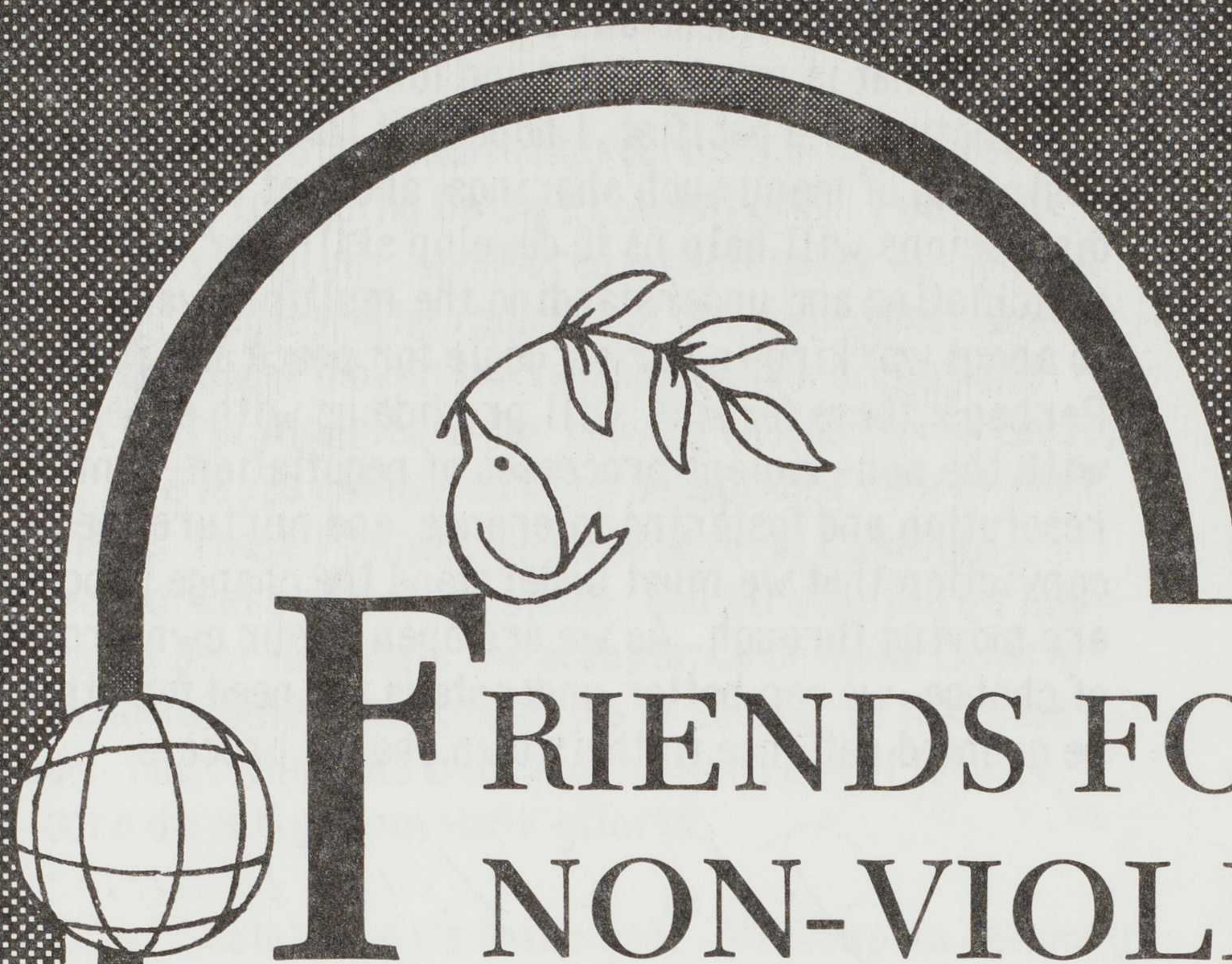




FRIENDS FOR A NON-VIOLENT WORLD

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PALESTINE: WHAT PRICE PEACE?

By Bara Berg

A Palestinian refugee camp in occupied Gaza, August 1988: the stench of the open sewer running through the camp, the infected skin of the camp's children, the families of 12 and 14 sharing two room sheds with the walls covered with bedrolls and children's drawings. A mother is telling us of her arrest and physical abuse by Israeli soldiers three weeks before her last son was born. The infant sleeps at his mother's feet while she fans away the ever present flies. The father hasn't seen his son; he is still in detention where he may be held for up to six months without charges, a hearing or a trial.

My eyes fill with tears, my heart with rage at the injustice of the conditions. I could understand a cry for revenge from this family. But the woman echoes the questions we've heard in so many other Palestinian homes: "The Israelis have taken two thirds of our land; why can't they let us live in peace on the one third we have left?"

I found a compelling thirst for peace in the occupied territories. These are people who know the stupidity and hopelessness of perpetual conflict. The pragmatism born of life under occupation has molded a nationalism willing to pay any price for liberation -- even the price of compromise.

The building of peace is hard work, demanding concessions, compromise and the courage to trust and

take risks. The cost of peace in the Middle East will be high for all parties.

The Palestinians must pay perhaps the highest price. They must give up their claim to the land wrested from them in 1947 and 1948 and accept the existence of Israel on land which had been Palestinian. The Israeli "birth certificate", the U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947, had called for the creation of two states -- one Jewish and one Arab -- from the partition of the British mandate (or colony) of Palestine. This resolution was cited by Yasser Arafat last November 17th in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence as providing the "international legitimacy" for establishment of an independent Palestinian state next to the state of Israel. Arafat and the Palestinian National Council have now accepted the two state solution which Middle East analysts have long thought the only promising program for peace. With Arafat's acceptance of the three points demanded by the U.S. as a precondition for talks, the major concession on the part of Palestinian leadership has been taken. There are certainly Palestinians unwilling to accept such a concession, and they can be expected to attack the peace process in a desperate effort to block compromise. The Palestinian mainstream will have to dissociate itself clearly from extremists like Abu Nidal.

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