

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

November 25, 2003

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders united in support of active, determined U.S. leadership in pursuit of peace between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab states - the kind of leadership to which you committed the United States at Aqaba in support of the Road Map to Peace. Evidence of public support among Israelis and Palestinians for civil society peace efforts such as the Geneva Accord makes this a particularly important and hopeful time for determined leadership.

We are coming to Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, December 2, and will hold a Press Conference at 2:00 pm to announce the National Interreligious Initiative. As you know, we hope to meet with you in the very near future to discuss ways we and our constituents can support U.S. leadership for peace in the coming months. At the same time, we are communicating with members of Congress and other elected officials to urge broad, non-partisan support for fair, firm U.S. leadership for peace.

As Palestinian and Israeli leaders consider their options, we believe renewed high level U.S. engagement will be essential to help both sides take the bold steps necessary to rebuild hope that peace is possible. We fear if the Road Map is allowed to fail Israelis and Palestinians will sink even deeper into cycles of violence and counter violence that could escalate into regional confrontation, undermine the global campaign against terrorism, and threaten vital U.S. security interests in the region and worldwide.

As representatives of religious traditions rooted in the Middle East and leaders of communities with deep ties to people on both sides of this tragic conflict, we believe working together for peace reflects a central, shared moral imperative of our Abrahamic religious traditions. We believe the vast majority of Americans, as well as majorities of Israelis and Palestinians, will support more active, determined U.S. and international engagement, including consistent, visible presence of the special Presidential envoy and much more vigorous public monitoring of the steps that each side must take.

We support the Road Map's goal - the goal you articulated more than a year ago - of a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state alongside the existing Jewish state of Israel, with enduring peace and security for both peoples. Achieving this goal is essential to comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions, 242, 338, and 1397.

We support the Road Map's unequivocal call for an end to all acts of violence as essential to building peace. We are encouraged by evidence from polls that majorities on both sides understand that the fundamental aspirations of each side - real security for Israelis and the end of occupation for Palestinians - cannot be achieved by violence, but only by negotiations. We believe pursuing peace requires dialogue and other efforts by people on each side seeking to understand the real fears, grievances, and legitimate aspirations of people on the other side.

We support the Road Map's call for reciprocal, simultaneous steps to be taken by the Palestinian Authority and by the Israeli Government to help restore hope and make tangible progress toward peace in the areas of Security, Palestinian Institution Building, Humanitarian Response, Civil Society and Settlements. So far the steps taken by both sides have been far too timid and the monitoring process practically invisible. In the enclosed document we recommend twelve "Urgent Steps for Peace." We believe U.S. insistence on these steps would be supported by large majorities in our communities, by majorities of Israelis and Palestinians, and would win substantial moral and political support worldwide.

Your creative, determined leadership in the coming weeks and months will be crucial for overcoming the bitter legacy of violence and for building confidence that even in the face of setbacks the Road Map can work. We encourage you to be steadfast as you face the challenges from those, motivated by fear and hate or mere political partisanship, who will seek to block the road to peace. We pray you will have the resolve and strength to persevere.

The God of Abraham gives all of us hope to believe that peace between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states is possible. We believe that the principles and ideas discussed in official and unofficial talks between Israelis and Palestinians, and also in earlier negotiations between Israel and Syria provide realistic benchmarks for mutually acceptable solutions and that achieving a just, comprehensive peace in the Middle East is essential for progress in the global campaign against terrorism and for the future of world peace. We believe that the land which was the birthplace of all three Abrahamic religions can once again become a source of hope, justice and reconciliation for the whole world and that Jerusalem can become the city of peace.

Respectfully,