

## **Archbishop of Washington**

### **National Interreligious Leadership Delegation in Support of the Road Map for Peace in the Middle East**

National Press Club  
December 2, 2003

I am honored to be here with this extraordinary group of religious leaders. We are united in our common call to our nation to do everything it can to overcome and resist violence and to pursue the path of justice and peace in the land we all call "Holy."

I come as a Catholic bishop with long and close ties to the Jewish community in this country and with an active and growing dialogue with the Muslim community. The Catholic Church strongly supports both the survival and security of Israel and a free and viable state for Palestinians. In the global picture, we believe that failure to achieve a just peace in this critical area imperils the quest for peace and security in the Middle East and in the world itself.

Each of us here knows all-too-well how much our Jewish, Muslim and Christian brothers and sisters are suffering. This is why we come together -- not to take sides, but to insist and plead that our government use its enormous influence to press Israeli and Palestinian leaders to move beyond the paralysis of the moment and do everything to advance the prospects for a just peace, and nothing to diminish them. Israelis and Palestinians are the ones who must create a just peace, but the United States has a moral obligation to use its powerful influence to help them do this. President Bush committed the United States to this kind of U.S. leadership when he outlined the Road Map. Together, we urge him and all our national leaders to take up again this process which can lead to a just peace.

Many who know a lot more about this than I do, believe that there is an opportunity at this moment for the United States to exercise this moral leadership. The many cross-community civil society initiatives that are underway are one indication of a growing conviction that peace is still possible. We believe the vast majority of Americans, as well as Israelis and Palestinians, will support more active, determined U.S. and international efforts to help revive the peace process.

Specifically, in order to renew momentum in the Road Map, we urge the following:

1. The United States should strongly reiterate the Road Map's unequivocal call for an end to all acts of violence and work actively with the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli Government and Arab states to achieve and maintain a ceasefire agreement.

2. In exercising more active, determined leadership, there is a need to have a consistent, United States engagement and the visible presence of the special Presidential Envoy, together with active, public monitoring of the implementation of the Road Map by both sides.

3. The Road Map calls for parallel and simultaneous steps by each side to begin to address the core concerns of the other side. The United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should spell out specific steps each side must take, along with an explicit timetable. (Rabbi Menitoff and Imam Rauf will elaborate on these difficult but essential steps)

For our part, we will share today's initiative with the 300 Catholic bishops in the United States and their diocesan networks, with our counterparts in the Holy Land, with the Holy See, and with Episcopal conferences around the world we will urge them to join us in a common effort.

In January, Bishop Wilton Gregory, the president of our bishops' conference and a signatory of our document, will share this initiative at a meeting that will involve all the Catholic bishops in the Holy Land as well as leaders of other bishops' conferences.

Finally, we will use this initiative as a complement to our continued advocacy with our own government and Congress for strong U.S. leadership for peace in the Middle East.

This is Advent, a season of special hope for Christians, but our hearts are breaking because of what is happening in the land where Jesus was born. The leadership of President Bush, advanced so clearly in the Road Map, together with the active engagement of other national leaders 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 peace process can be put back on track. This is a crucial time for U.S. leadership, creativity and perseverance. It is also a time for hope.