

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

June 1, 2004

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
U.S. Secretary of State
Department of State
2020 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell,

We are American Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders committed to working together for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace inspired by the deepest teachings in our religious traditions and by people's profound hope for peace. Last Fall 33 prominent religious leaders united to form the unprecedented National Interreligious Leadership Initiative. At a press conference in Washington, D.C. on December 2 we announced the Initiative.

As we have said in letters to the President and every member of Congress, we believe a substantial majority of Americans support the United States making peace in the Middle East an urgent priority. Consistent with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and with the solemn commitments made by President Bush over the last two years, the National Interreligious Initiative calls for immediate reengagement at the highest level of active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in pursuing full implementation of the Road Map to Peace. We have endorsed twelve specific steps for U.S. policy and are encouraged by the close parallel between these steps and the steps called for by the Quartet on May 4.

We welcomed your warm letter of December 8 commending our efforts as valuable for bringing "together people from differing perspectives" and serving "as an example that religious communities can be a force for peace." We are especially appreciative of this opportunity to meet with you to present our views and discuss specific ways we might work with you to advance our shared goal of peace.

As you will understand, the precious bonds our communities have with different sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, cause us to have different and sometimes conflicting viewpoints. For example we had different responses to President Bush's support for Prime Minister Sharon's unilateral initiative. However, we believe our points of common agreement are more important than our disagreements and we believe that now is the time to work together for peace.

We remember President Bush's declaration at Aqaba a year ago that "no leader of conscience can accept more months and years of humiliation, killing and mourning." Yet, the humiliation, killing and mourning continue, with the killing in May alone of more than twenty Israelis and ninety Palestinians, and the demolition of homes of 360 families in Gaza. We believe, despite current

preoccupation with Iraq and election year pressures, the United States must make peace between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab states an active, urgent priority in the coming months.

At Aqaba President Bush welcomed commitments by Israeli and Palestinian leaders to implement the Road Map to Peace and promised to "strive to see these commitments fulfilled." Recently, on the occasion of Prime Minister Sharon's visit, the President reiterated this promise, declaring "the United States remains committed to the two-state solution for peace in the Middle East. . .and to the Road Map as the best path to realize this vision."

All of us are concerned that active U.S. leadership on behalf of the Road Map must be restarted now. We are troubled by evidence that the Road Map has effectively been put on hold until after the elections.

The President's statement supporting Prime Minister Sharon's unilateral initiative without announcing immediate, high-level U.S. reengagement, in coordination with the Quartet, has raised doubts about the Administration's commitment to press now for resumption of direct negotiations between the parties and simultaneous steps by both sides as called for in the Road Map. We see such steps as essential to develop the trust and momentum to achieve peace.

Recent events in Gaza demonstrate the terrible human costs and dangers for Palestinians and for Israel if the the cycle of violence continues. We fear that unless the United States makes the Road Map and negotiations for peace an urgent priority now, the continuing cycle of Israeli and Palestinian violence will jeopardize prospects for a two-state solution, further alienate our European and Mideast Arab allies, exacerbate conflict in Iraq, and increase the terrorist threat to the United States. We believe U.S. reengagement in active peacemaking would revitalize hopes for peace and be a timely, urgently needed message about our country's important, positive role in the world.

Majorities of Israelis and Palestinians desperately want to see an end to the violence, not only because of the terrible toll in human life, but also because it is clear that peace with justice, that is real security for Israelis and an end of occupation for Palestinians can only be achieved by negotiations

The Israeli and Palestinian people need America's help now. They desperately need active, fair and firm U.S. leadership now, in coordination with the Quartet. In addition to presenting our Appeal to you, we plan to present its message to members of Congress, Senator Kerry as the presumptive Democratic Party candidate for President, and all candidates for office. We offer the following specific ideas for tangible steps that would signal U.S. reengagement.

Return a Presidential Envoy to Jerusalem with a commitment to remain there on the ground to renew momentum on the Road Map, including working for an immediate ceasefire and resumption of negotiations;

Negotiate a timetable for specific reciprocal, simultaneous steps to be taken by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, with a highly visible monitoring system to assure implementation by both sides;

Take the lead, in light of possible Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, to increase economic aid (with effective controls by a credible institution such as the World Bank) to support the Palestinian Authority's capacity to provide security, prevent violent attacks on Israelis, and deliver humanitarian aid, vital services, and development assistance to the Palestinian people.

Support realistic benchmark principles and ideas for possible Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian peace agreements drawn from earlier official negotiations and from current Israeli-Palestinian civil society initiatives such as the People's Voice and Geneva Accord.

Again, we welcome this opportunity to meet with you to discuss ways we might work together to advance the urgent goal of Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace for the sake of the peoples of the Middle East, for the sake of the American people, and for the sake of world peace. We believe active fair and firm U.S. leadership now in pursuit of full implementation of the Road Map would be supported by a substantial majority of Americans. We are prepared to utilize the full weight of our offices and the nationwide communication networks of our organizations to serve this goal.

Signatories

Christian Leaders

His Eminence, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick
Archbishop of Washington

His Eminence, William Cardinal Keeler
Archbishop of Baltimore

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, Primate
Greek Orthodox Church in America

Bishop Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader, Secretary, Council of Bishops
United Methodist Church

The Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold III, Presiding Bishop
The Episcopal Church, USA

The Reverend John H. Thomas, General Minister & President
United Church of Christ

The Reverend Wm. Chris Hobgood, General Minister & President
Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)

The Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk
Presbyterian Church, USA

The Reverend John Buchanan, Editor/Publisher,
Christian Century

David Neff, Editor and Vice President
Christianity Today

The Reverend Leighton Ford, President
Leighton Ford Ministries

Richard J. Mouw, President
Fuller Theological Seminary

Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory, Bishop of Belleville
President, US Conference of Catholic Bishops

Rev. Dr. John R. Deckenback
Conference Minister, Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ

Serge Duss, Director
Washington, D.C. Office of Public Policy and Advocacy

Dr. Roger Parrott, President
Belhaven College

Jewish Leaders

Rabbi Janet Marder, President
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, Executive Vice President
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Rabbi Amy Small, President
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector
University of Judaism

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, Dean
Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Harry K. Danziger, Vice President
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi David N. Saperstein, Director
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Rabbi Peter S. Knobel, Former Member of the Board of Trustees
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Rabbi Merle S. Singer
Temple Beth El - Boca Raton, Florida

Rabbi David E. Stern
Temple Emanu-El - Dallas, Texas

Muslim Leaders

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, Secretary General
Islamic Society of North America

Naeem Baig, General Secretary
Islamic Circle of North America

Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, Leader
The Mosque Cares

Iftekhhar A. Hai, Founding Director & Director, Interfaith Relations
United Muslims of America

Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain
Georgetown University

Dawud A. Assad, Former President
Council of Mosques, USA

Syedeh Nahid Angha, Co-Founder
International Association of Sufism

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder
ASMA Society

Delegation Co-Coordinator

Dr. Bruce E. Wexler, President
A Different Future

Ronald J. Young, Executive Director
U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East

Rev. Canon Sanford Garner
United Religions Initiative

* Organizations Listed for Identification Only