

## **National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East**

### **Appeal to the President to Make Israeli-Palestinian Peace a Priority of U.S. Policy**

February 28, 2006

MR. PRESIDENT, We are American Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders, including heads of more than twenty-five national organizations. Like religious leaders in the Middle East who signed the Alexandria Declaration, we pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. We share a deep religious commitment to ending violence and achieving a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinian people and the other Arab states.

Hamas' victory in Palestinian elections and the incapacitating illness of Ariel Sharon create new challenges for peace-making efforts. While the world waits to see the form and policies of new Palestinian and Israeli governments we believe that your leadership, Mr. President, in coordination with the Quartet, is more essential than ever to prevent a new spiral of violence and to assure renewed progress toward peace. Let Palestinians and Israelis know now that following the formation of their new governments, you and your Administration will work with determination and urgency to achieve peace.

We support your careful response to the Palestinian democratic election results, appreciating that Hamas' victory sends a clear message that Palestinians want a government committed to reform and responsible provision of services. We support your not acting precipitously to cut-off aid to the Palestinian people. We support your firm insistence that Hamas reject violence, recognize Israel and, consistent with the documented views of Palestinian and Israeli majorities, join the international consensus for a two-state solution to resolve the conflict.

In pursuing this internationally supported vision of peace based on U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338, we believe the immediate challenge is for the United States, in coordination with the Quartet, to get the Palestinian Authority and Israel to agree to a lasting ceasefire, and then to get both sides to take reciprocal steps as called for in the initial phase of the Road Map toward a negotiated two-state solution.

We know that our constituencies in the United States support continued and intensified U.S. diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the Holy Land. We pray that the new Palestinian and Israeli leaderships will represent the interests of their people in moving out of the quagmire of dehumanization and violence, and into a future of security, peace and prosperity for both peoples.

We urge your support for the following important, timely steps and pledge our support for your efforts.

Press for an immediate, comprehensive and lasting ceasefire, a step that both Palestinian and Israeli leaders could support.

Work to assure that the agreement on Gaza, negotiated with crucial hands-on leadership by Secretary of State Rice, is fully implemented. Building on the opportunity created by Israel's withdrawal will generate confidence that future agreements on more difficult issues can succeed.

Press the Palestinian Authority and Israel to implement their commitments to reciprocal, simultaneous steps as obligated in the Road Map. Palestinian and Israeli majorities support reciprocal steps toward a two-state solution as the best route to peace

Appoint an on-the-ground special envoy to manage and monitor negotiations. This would build on Secretary Rice's effective engagement in achieving the agreement on Gaza.

Mr. President, based on the deepest beliefs in our three Abrahamic religious traditions, we support your vision of peace - an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state existing alongside the State of Israel, with peace and security for both peoples and a negotiated resolution of the status of Jerusalem. We believe that with active, fair and firm U.S. leadership peace can be achieved during your Presidency. We believe achieving Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace is not only essential for Israelis and Palestinians, but also for reducing the threat of global terrorism, easing tensions among our religious communities worldwide, encouraging democracy in the region, and building world peace.

At this time of new challenges, we need to remember there is a deep human longing for peace and security among people on both sides. And we need to remind ourselves progress toward peace has been based on the hard learned reality that neither side can make the other side disappear and that the only realistic solution is a negotiated solution.

We pledge our prayers and active support for your efforts. We will continue to work with local religious leaders and congregations across the country to generate broad, public support, including bi-partisan Congressional support, for your leadership for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

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#### Christian Leaders

His Eminence, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington

His Eminence, William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore

Most Reverend William Skylstad, President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

H.E., Archbishop Demetrios, Primate, Greek Orthodox Church in America

H.E., Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate, Armenian Apostolic Church in America

The Reverend Michael E. Livingston, President, National Council of Churches

## USA

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

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, Presiding Bishop, Episcopal Church

Bishop Ann B. Sherer, Representing the Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church

The Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Reverend John Thomas, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, Gen'l Minister and Pres., Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)

Richard E. Stearns, President, World Vision

The Reverend Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries

Richard J. Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary

The Reverend John M. Buchanan, Editor and Publisher, Christian Century

David Neff, Editor and Vice President, Christianity Today

## Jewish Leaders

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

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus, CCAR

Rabbi Brant Rosen, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Rabbi Elliot Dorf, Rector, University of Judaism

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

Rabbi Peter S. Knobel, Member of the Council, Parliament of World Religions

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

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

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

Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Vice President, A Different Future

## 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

Imam Hassan Qazwini, Islamic Center of America

Dawud Assad, Preident Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Director, American Sufi Muslim Association (ASMA)

Iftekhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America

Nahid Angha, Ph.D., Co-Director, International Association of Sufism (IAS)

Imam Yahya Hendi, Chaplain, Georgetown University