

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

Tel: (360) 652-4285 E-Mail: [usicpme@aol.com](mailto:usicpme@aol.com)

Website: [www.nili-mideastpeace.org](http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org)

January 30, 2008

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

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to express our support for your active leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace as witnessed in the Annapolis meeting, the donors' conference for aid to the Palestinian Authority, and your recent trip to the Middle East, including your commitment to make one or more additional visits later this year. From its founding in 2003, the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (NILI), representing more than thirty Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders, including heads of twenty-five national organizations, has advocated that our nation has an inescapable responsibility and an indispensable role to play in achieving peace and that achieving Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace will have very important positive reverberations in the region and worldwide.

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice a year ago and we have been grateful for the opportunity for regular meetings with Under Secretary Nicholas Burns to learn firsthand what the Administration is doing and to offer our ideas and support. While the renewal of negotiations and the commitments made by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas are encouraging, we believe consistent, determined leadership by Secretary Rice and yourself in the coming months will be essential for peace negotiations to succeed. We are united in urging public support, including bipartisan support in the Congress, for active U.S. leadership to achieve the following positive steps.

Consistent with the Road Map, the U.S. and Quartet should press more urgently for meaningful reciprocal, simultaneous steps by Israel and the Palestinian Authority to improve conditions on the ground and help restore people's hopes that a peace agreement is possible. Steps should include achieving a comprehensive, effective ceasefire covering Israel, the West Bank and Gaza; the Palestinian Authority developing coordinated security and increased capacity for governance, blocking illegal arms shipments and disarming militias; and Israel freezing expansion of settlements, withdrawing "illegal outposts," releasing more Palestinian prisoners, and easing movement for Palestinians by reducing the number of military check points. Effective public monitoring of international aid and of implementation of these reciprocal steps is essential to hold the parties accountable to their commitments.

On the need for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to agree on principles for guiding negotiations to resolve final status issues, including borders and security arrangements, settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem, we urge public U.S. support for the benchmark ideas developed by Israelis and Palestinians in official and unofficial negotiations over many years, and reflected in public documents such as the People's Voice initiative and the Geneva Accord. Public opinion polls consistently report that majorities of Israelis and Palestinians would likely accept a peace agreement along these lines.

We are concerned that the split in Palestinian governance between the West Bank and Gaza is incompatible with a durable peace agreement. Acknowledging the sensitivity of this issue for the Administration and for our own communities, we believe the United States should also quietly support efforts by others, possibly including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to help form a new unified Palestinian government capable of representing both the West Bank and Gaza, and committed to rejecting violence, accepting previous agreements, and negotiating a two-state solution as the basis for peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine.

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Appreciating the positive importance of the Saudi-led Arab Peace Initiative and Arab states' participation in the Annapolis conference for the prospect of comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, we believe the United States should support restarting Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli negotiations for peace. We take note of the fact that U.S. hosted Israeli-Syrian negotiations in 1995 and 2000 achieved substantial progress on principles and practical ideas for a peace agreement.

We pledge our prayers and our active support in the coming months for your determined leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace and we pledge to help generate public support in our communities across the country. As it might be helpful and timely, we would welcome an opportunity for a delegation of national Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders to meet with you.

Respectfully,

**Christian Religious Leaders:**

His Eminence, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus, Archdiocese of Washington\*

His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago  
and President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops\*

Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, Diocesan Legate and Exec. Dir., Ecumenical Office, Armenian Orthodox Church  
and President, National Council of Churches of Christ USA\*

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

Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop, Episcopal Church\*

Bishop Ann B. Sherer, United Methodist Church\*

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

John H. Thomas, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ\*

The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister & President, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)\*

The Reverend Michael E. Livingston, Executive Director, Internat'l Council of Community Churches\*

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

Richard J. Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary\*

The Reverend Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries\*

David Neff, Editor and Vice-President, Christianity Today\*

**Jewish Religious Leaders:**

Rabbi Peter Knobel, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis\*

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

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

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University (formerly University of Judaism)\*

Dr. Carl Sheingold, Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation\*

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association\*

Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association\*

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

**Muslim Religious Leaders:**

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America\*

Imam Mohammed ibn Hagmagid, Vice President, Islamic Society of North America\*

Naim Baig, Secretary General, Islamic Circle of North America\*

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder, American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA)\*

Dawud Assad, President, Council of Mosques, USA

Imam Yahya Hendi, Chaplain, Georgetown University\*

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

\*Organizations for Identification Only

Cc: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice  
Members of Congress