

America's Christian Leaders Encourage President Bush to Push for Israeli-Palestinian Peace and the Sharing of Jerusalem

(Washington, DC, January 24, 2007) Christian leaders of American churches and Christian institutions from a range of traditions – Orthodox, Catholic, mainstream and evangelical Protestants – have appealed to President Bush for peace in the Holy Land. In a January 23 letter, the leaders jointly express their “hopes and prayers for peace in the land we all call Holy and for the reconciliation of the children of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims.”

The 39 signers of the letter to the President represent a broad spectrum of Christians in the United States. The principal signers have partner churches in Israel and Palestine: Archbishop Barsamian of the Armenian Church, Bishop Dimitrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church. Among the signers are the leaders of major development organizations including Rev. John L McCullough of Church World Service, Ken Hackett of Catholic Relief Services, and Msgr. Robert Stern of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine. Prominent evangelical signers include Ambassador Robert A. Seiple - the former Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Richard Mouw, Tony Campolo, Jim Wallis and David Neff. Other signers include Rev. Robert Edgar of the National Council of Churches, Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Rev. John Thomas of the United Church of Christ, Bishop Earl McCloud of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the President of the United Methodist's Council of Bishops, Bishop Janice Riggie Huie.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson said, “The main message of the letter is one of encouragement. We ask President Bush to make Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace initiative, an urgent priority for his Administration. We know that many view the Israeli-Palestinian situation as the most intractable in our troubled world, but we know that when it is resolved, the positive repercussions will go well beyond that small geographic area.”

Richard Mouw, the President of Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, points to a deepening concern for the welfare and future of the Palestinian Christian community. He said, “The future of the Palestinian Christians requires a solution to the conflict that will allow both peoples – Israelis and Palestinians – to live side-by-side in two states where all enjoy justice, peace and security.”

Bishop Wenski, the chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Policy said "Christian leaders in the Holy Land have asked us to bring to the President's attention the very grave situation of Jerusalem. With the construction by Israel of the separation barrier, many religious people, both Christians and Muslims, do not have access to the Holy City. One particular concern for Christians is the stark reality that Jerusalem is severed from nearby Bethlehem. We ask the President to work with Israelis, Palestinians and the international community to guarantee access to Jerusalem's Holy Places and to protect religious liberty for all peoples."