

# Churches for Middle East Peace



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February 9, 2007

C. David Welch  
Assistant Secretary of State  
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
Fax: 736-4462

Dear Assistant Secretary Welch,

**Churches for Middle East Peace urgently appeals to you and Secretary Rice to convince the government of Israel to halt excavations near the Temple Mount/Harem al-Sharif.** The quickly escalating violent response to Ariel Sharon's visit to the compound in 2000 demonstrated the sensitivity of actions affecting the compound. Unless Israel quickly stops the excavation work, and the planned construction, we fear that violent protests will break out in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza and far beyond. Today's protests by 10,000 people in Nazareth exemplifies the combusive nature of actions that appear to violate the sanctity of this profoundly holy site. Perhaps, with appropriate consultation with Wafq authorities who maintain the Harem al-Sharif, and with their cooperation, construction necessary for safe access could be resumed.

**The long-held policy of the United States that the status of Jerusalem must be determined by a negotiated agreement and that neither party should take actions that would prejudge the outcome of negotiations must be strongly asserted by US officials.**

The news of Secretary Rice's meeting on February 19 with Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas is encouraging to all who seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict with two viable and secure states living side-by-side. Additionally, reports of an emerging Palestinian unity government increase hope that intra-Palestinian violence will subside and that preparations can be made for negotiations with Israel. The United States could provide a strong signal of the rewards of taking steps toward peace by resuming financial assistance to a new unity government.

But instead, these important steps toward peacemaking may be overwhelmed by the consequences – widespread public protests and angry objections of moderate Arab allies – of Israel's actions in the Old City of Jerusalem.

A delegation from Churches for Middle East Peace visited Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif last year. We were again reminded of just how significant this site is to our Muslims brothers and sisters and therefore feel even more acutely for them at this time. We appreciate your attention to our concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Maureen Shea  
Chair of Board

Corinne Whitlatch  
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JPIC Council

Friends Committee on National  
Legislation

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese  
of America

Maryknoll Missioners

Mennonite Central Committee

Moravian Church in America

National Council of Churches

Presbyterian Church (USA)

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Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ  
Common Global Ministries Board

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Women's Division

