

Churches for Middle East Peace



110 Maryland Avenue NE, #311 • Washington, D.C. 20002 • (202)543-1222 • Fax: (202)543-5025 • info@cmep.org • www.cmep.org

Maureen Shea, Chair
Warren Clark, Executive Director
Anna Rhee, Grassroots Coordinator
Julie Schumacher Cohen, Legislative
Coordinator

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service
Committee

Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese of North America

Armenian Orthodox Church

Catholic Conference of Major
Superiors of Men's Institutes

Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Common Global Ministries Board

Church of the Brethren

Church World Service

Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church
in America

Franciscan Friars (OFM)
English Speaking Conference,
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)

Reformed Church in America

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ
Common Global Ministries Board

United Methodist Church
General Board of Church and Society
General Board of Global Ministries:
Women's Division

February 29, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

As you prepare to return to the Middle East, we – the leaders of U.S. Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches and church-related organizations that make up Churches for Middle East Peace – are writing to ask you to take urgent action to address the still unresolved Gaza crisis. The continuing violence and suffering experienced by Palestinians and Israelis is hindering progress on the peace process and also create conditions that pose a particular threat to the small Christian community in Gaza.

As people of faith, we are greatly concerned by the situation of civilians caught in the conflict. The blockade of Gaza and the frequent occurrence of rocket attacks against southern Israel cannot be tolerated. The blockade results in power outages, water and food shortages and a lack of adequate access to medical supplies that create a humanitarian crisis felt by all Gazans, while rocket attacks on Israel have targeted civilians indiscriminately and made normal life impossible in the areas affected.

If action is not taken soon, the possibility of a larger military confrontation looms. We welcome your February 22 statement announcing additional U.S. resources to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza and recognizing that improvements on the ground are necessary to the peace process. **We join together to ask you to work with the international community to achieve a ceasefire, end the blockade, and establish real security at Gaza's borders.** The current closure and separation of Gaza has increased violence and humanitarian hardship. It also is not compatible with the vision of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state living in peace alongside a secure Israel for which you and President Bush have so eloquently called.

While our concern is for all the peoples of the Holy Land, we must raise our particular distress about the recent bombing of the YMCA library in Gaza. Though authorities in Gaza have denounced this action, it follows the killing of a Christian bookseller last fall and is symptomatic of the deteriorating social conditions and instability that threaten the safety of all the residents of Gaza. A reduction of tensions in Gaza and the easing of daily life will strengthen the tiny Christian community just as progress on the peace process will help sustain Christian communities elsewhere in the region. Such steps are vital to preserving the cultural and religious pluralism that has long enriched the Middle East.

Continued on page 2

We believe that all the children of Abraham should be able to live in the “land of milk and honey” free of violence and insecurity and with the ability to provide a positive future for their families. We are grateful to you and President Bush for your efforts, and we urge you to use your upcoming visit to resolve the Gaza crisis and enable substantive progress forward on peace negotiations. Our prayers will be with you as you travel and in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Bishop Wayne Burkette
Moravian Church in America

Marie Dennis
Director
Maryknoll Global Concerns

Sr. Donna Graham, OSF
President
Franciscan Friars (OFM)
English Speaking Conference, JPIC Council

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Dr. Stan Hastey
Minister for Mission and Ecumenism
Alliance of Baptists

The Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary
National Council of the Churches of Christ
in the USA

Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church, (USA)

Albert C. Lobe
Interim Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee

Reverend John L. McCullough
Executive Director and CEO
Church World Service

Mary Ellen McNish
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Stanley J. Noffsinger
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren

Bishop William B. Oden
Ecumenical Officer
The Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Very Rev. Thomas Picton, CSsR
President
Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of
Men's Institutes

Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba)
Primate
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
of North America

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop
Episcopal Church

Rev. William G. Sinkford
President
Unitarian Universalist Association of
Congregations

The Rev. John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Joe Volk
Executive Secretary
Friends Committee on National Legislation