

# 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

February 17, 2006

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

Dear Dr. Rice:

We write to encourage your leadership to restore confidence that the United States is fully committed to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that realizes the vision of the President, and our own, of a secure state of Israel living side-by-side and at peace with a viable and contiguous state of Palestine. Your negotiations regarding Gaza, while not yet fully realized, were an important demonstration of the vital role the United States can play in helping the two parties resolve critical issues. We were reassured by your statement on February 8<sup>th</sup>, in the press conference with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, of a continued desire for a two-state solution. We fully agree with you about the importance of Israel not acting to unilaterally predetermine the outcome of the final status agreements and the necessity of a new Palestinian government's renunciation of violence and recognition of the right of Israel to exist.

Churches for Middle East Peace is a coalition of the public policy offices of 21 churches and church-related organizations – Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. In our communications and meetings with Congressional offices, Churches for Middle East Peace promotes bipartisan support for the Administration's engagement and efforts to pave the way for negotiated agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. We are concerned that, at this time of change and crisis, some members of Congress are proposing legislation that would block the diplomatic options of this Administration and future Administrations. We urge the State Department to be more assertively engaged in discussion with members of Congress about the fundamental requirements for, and importance of, a durable two-state solution and the need for flexibility if the United States is to play its role in seeking peace.

Among the many issues in play at this time, Churches for Middle East Peace is compelled to address three: the humanitarian situation, the Palestinian Christians, and the status of Jerusalem.

We are alarmed by the grievous humanitarian situation of the Palestinians and calls to end financial assistance from the United States and internationally. We condemn Hamas's position on both use of violence and refusal to recognize Israel, and we also support U.S. efforts to help the Palestinian people. We hope the efforts you

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Maureen Shea, Chair  
Corinne Whitlatch, Director  
Anna Rhee, Program Consultant  
Julie Schumacher Cohen, Legislative  
Coordinator

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service  
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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

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

began in Gaza will continue. Without work and the transport of goods, the economy will only worsen. Some American humanitarian groups working in the Occupied Territories worry that pending legislation will force them to halt their work, which includes the broad range of human needs and the building of civil society. The U.S. cannot let the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people worsen. That would be wrong morally and politically.

The Palestinian Christian community, small and decreasing in numbers, plays an important role in Palestinian civil society and as a bridge between Jews and Muslims and, along with other Arab Christians, between Muslims and Western Christians. We encourage responses by the U.S. that could moderate Hamas and Palestinian governance, domestically as well as relative to Israel. The Patriarchs and Bishops of Jerusalem's churches, in congratulating the Palestinian people "for their democratic performance in the recent elections," point to the importance of "the rule of law together with full religious freedom, especially in the social and educational fields."

The profound importance of Jerusalem to both Israelis and Palestinians - be they Jews, Christians or Muslims -- and to the faithful everywhere, demands your immediate and careful attention. The declaration by Israel's Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that Israel will retain "united Jerusalem," coupled with the high priority given to completing the separation barrier and settlement expansion in the Jerusalem area, appears to unilaterally prejudge the final status of Jerusalem and establishment of borders. Such unilateral moves have the potential of heightening inter-religious strife, and if agreed to by the United States, severely affecting U.S. standing around the world.

We appeal to you and the President to revive hope for a secure Israel, that is recognized by its neighbors, and for a viable, democratic state of Palestine, that is recognized as legitimate at home and abroad, by providing assurances that Jerusalem will be shared by the two states and three faiths and can serve as the capital of both.

Sincerely,

***Bishop Vicken Aykazian***  
Legate  
Armenian Orthodox Church

***Mia Adjali***  
Executive Secretary for Global Concerns  
Women's Division, Global Ministries  
United Methodist Church

***J. Daryl Byler***  
Director, Washington Office  
Mennonite Central Committee

***+Bishop Dimitrios Couchell***  
Ecumenical Officer  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

***Rev. Robert Edgar***  
General Secretary  
National Council of Churches USA

***Heather Foote***  
Director, Washington Office  
American Friends Service Committee

***Stan Hastey***  
Executive Director  
Alliance of Baptists

***Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory***  
Director, Washington Office  
Presbyterian Church, (USA)

***Phil Jones***

Director  
Brethren Witness/Washington Office

***Rob Keithan***

Director  
Washington Office for Advocacy  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
of Congregations

***James Kofski, M.M.***

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

***Peter E. Makari***

Executive, Middle East and Europe  
Common Global Ministries Board of the  
United Church of Christ and  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

***Rev. John McCollough***

Executive Director and CEO  
Church World Service

***T. Michael McNulty, SJ***

Justice and Peace Director  
Conference of Major Superiors of Men

***Fr. George Rados***

Representative  
Antiochian Christian Orthodox Archdiocese  
of North America

***Br. Mark Schroeder, OFM***

President  
Franciscan Friars (OFM)  
English Speaking Conference  
Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation  
Council

***Maureen Shea***

Director, Office of Governmental Relations  
The Episcopal Church

***Ann V. Staal***

Social Witness/Mid-East  
Reformed Church in America

***Karen S. Vagley***

Director of Advocacy  
Washington Office  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

***Joe Volk***

Executive Secretary  
Friends Committee on National Legislation