

Churches for Middle East Peace



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March 7, 2007

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

Dear Secretary Rice,

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is encouraged by your announcement that the United States will participate in international meetings sponsored by the Government of Iraq that will also include Syria and Iran. We support broadening the diplomatic engagement of the United States as a means to work for peace and stability in Iraq and the region.

We applaud the decision to join in high-level talks with Iran and Syria. We urge that this be the first step in diplomatic engagement with Syria and with Iran to deal with other outstanding issues that stand in the way of peace and security. We are alarmed that, despite Administration comments to the contrary, there is a widely-held perception that the United States is preparing for a military attack on Iran or is preparing Israel for such an attack. Active diplomacy, accompanied by stated support for peacemaking and respect for the United Nations and international treaties, could restore much of the goodwill that the United States once enjoyed as well as international cooperation in challenging Iran regarding its nuclear program.

Members of the CMEP Board and staff traveled to Syria, in April 2006, and to Iran, in late February 2007, to meet with government officials as well as both Christians and Muslim religious leaders. They report a considerable reservoir of friendly respect for the American people and apparent readiness for diplomatic engagement with the U.S. government. It is our recommendation that the United States look to the growing indigenous pressure for reform as the change agent for good governance in Syria and in Iran and that you engage with those currently in positions of authority.

In the context of a political process on the future of Iraq, we encourage the U.S. government to announce it will, in consultation with all Iraqi leaders and neighbors, develop a plan to work toward full military disengagement. Until then, the United States should avoid escalation.

Concurrent with the new diplomatic approach relative to Iraq, we urge your and the President's urgent and sustained attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which is inexorably linked to all key issues in the Middle East. We agree with the findings of the Iraq Study Group that "the only basis on which peace can be

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Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service
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Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese of North America

Armenian Orthodox Church

Catholic Conference of Major
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Moravian Church in America

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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

achieved is that set forth in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and in the principle of ‘land for peace.’” Toward the objective of a two-state solution that ends the occupation and provides recognition and security to Israel, we urge you to bring to the table Israelis and Palestinians, who have the authority to negotiate, to broker a comprehensive ceasefire and prepare for negotiating the final status issues: Jerusalem, borders, settlements and refugees. A more detailed vision of a permanent status agreement from the Quartet would be helpful as a political horizon for the leaders and their people.

We appreciate your attention to our policy recommendations. And know that you are ever in our prayers.

Sincerely,

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