

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

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January 27, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President:

We write as Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI) to offer our prayerful support on the occasion of your inauguration as 44th President of the United States.

We are united in support of your commitment to provide active, fair and firm U.S. leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace from the start of your presidency. We appreciate your telephone calls to Arab and Israeli leaders on your first day in office and your appointment of George Mitchell as the Middle East envoy, especially since NILI has repeatedly called for a special envoy.

Urgent U.S. diplomacy, in cooperation with Egypt and other parties, is needed immediately to help assure that the cessation of violence by Hamas and Israel is maintained and developed into a truly effective and sustainable ceasefire. People in our communities have different precious bonds with Israelis and Palestinians and responded in different ways to the recent war between Hamas and Israel. Nonetheless, we are united in support of the following elements as necessary to a sustainable ceasefire, including: Hamas' agreeing to stop all rocket attacks on Israel; international measures to prevent smuggling-resupply of rockets through the Sinai; Israel's agreeing to halt all military operations in Gaza, withdraw its forces, and open Gaza border crossings; and all parties' committing to the provision of substantial humanitarian and economic assistance to the people of Gaza.

We reiterate what we said in our November 2008 statement, "A Window of Hope for the Peace of Jerusalem," that despite discouraging developments and tragic violence there are signs of hope. Majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians still support a two-state solution. Arab states have declared their commitment to peace with Israel in the historic Arab Peace Initiative. Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian negotiations have made progress. Official and informal negotiations have produced principles and practical ideas for resolving the conflict, including the difficult issues of refugees and Jerusalem.

From the founding of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative in 2003, we have been united in urging U.S. leadership to encourage and support steps by both sides to restore hope for peace and renew momentum in peace negotiations. Building on a ceasefire agreement, the United States should insist that Israel fulfill its commitment to dismantle illegal outposts in the West Bank and halt all expansion of settlements. On the Palestinian side, the United States should support efforts to form a Palestinian government capable of representing the West Bank

and Gaza and committed to rejecting violence and negotiating a two-state solution with Israel. Building on the Arab Peace Initiative, the United States should engage actively in promoting direct negotiations for peace between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.

As Jews, Christians and Muslims, we share a common religious commitment to peace with justice for all of God's children. We refuse, now and always, to give into cynicism or despair. We are people of hope. We pledge to call upon members in churches, synagogues and mosques across the country to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to support you and your Administration in providing engaged U.S. leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. The time for peace is now.

We look forward to an early and timely occasion to meet with you as well as with Secretary of State Clinton and to continuing a practice of having regular high level meetings at the State Department to learn what the Administration is doing and to offer our ideas and support.

We pledge our prayers and active encouragement for your leadership for peace in the Middle East. Our nation and the world will be much safer with the achievement of peace in Jerusalem.

Respectfully,

Christian Leaders:

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington *

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace, USCCB*

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, Primate, Greek Orthodox Church in America*

His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate, Armenian Apostolic Church in America*

Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, President, National Council of Churches of Christ USA*

The Reverend Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ USA*

Bishop Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church*

The Reverend John H. Thomas, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ*

The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister, President, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)*

The Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)*

Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader, Ecumenical Officer, Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church*

The Reverend Michael E. Livingston, Executive Director, International Council of Community Churches*

The Reverend Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries, Board Member, World Vision US*

Richard J. Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary*

John Buchanan, Editor/Publisher, The Christian Century, Pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago*

David Neff, Editor and Vice-President, Christianity Today*

Jewish Leaders:

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism*

Rabbi Peter Knobel, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis*

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus, Central Conference of American Rabbis*

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University

Dr. Carl Sheingold, Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation*

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly*

Rabbi Brant Rosen, Immediate Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly*

Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly*
Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Vice President, A Different Future*
Rabbi Merle S. Singer, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Beth El, Boca Raton, Florida*

Muslim Leaders:

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America*
Imam Mohammed ibn Hagmagid, Vice President, Islamic Society of North America*
Naeem Baig, Secretary General, Islamic Circle of North America*
Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain, Georgetown University*
Dawud Assad, President Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA*
Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder, American Society for Muslim Advancement/Cordoba Initiative*
Eide Alawan, Interfaith Office for Outreach, Islamic Center of America*
Iftekhhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America*

*Organizations for Identification Only

Cc: U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton