



## Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

November 22, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2100 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to express deep concern over your recent announcement that “the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law.” Coming after President Donald Trump’s March 25, 2019 *Proclamation on Recognizing the Golan Heights as Part of the State of Israel* and his decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, this declaration is likely to exacerbate tensions, further damaging prospects for a peaceful resolution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The USCCB is one with the long-standing position of the Holy See which “supports the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security within the borders recognized by the international community and supports the same right that belongs to the Palestinian people, which must be recognized, respected and implemented.”

Likewise, the USCCB and the Holy See urge “that the two Parties, negotiating directly with each other, with the support of the international community and in compliance with United Nations resolutions, may find a fair compromise, which takes into account the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples.” (Statement of the Holy See, November 20, 2019). In this context, your unilateral declaration appears to justify Israel’s claim to Palestinian territory and could embolden Israel to seize other territory, such as the Jordan Valley, in the West Bank.

On numerous past occasions, the USCCB has issued statements and sent letters regarding the issue of Israeli settlements. These documents, which include some signed by Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious leaders, all indicate that the continued expansion of these settlements in the West Bank constitute an impediment to the peace process.

There is no doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be resolved easily. One step in that direction would be for you to guide the Administration in taking actions that recognize the rights and human dignity of all parties, Israeli and Palestinian; Jew, Christian and Muslim, and to provide humanitarian assistance to relieve the suffering of those most in need. I echo the words of Pope Francis who said in May 2018, “I am very worried and saddened by the escalation of tensions in the Holy land and in the Middle East... I invite all the parties involved and the international community to renew their commitment so that dialogue, justice and peace prevail.”

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend David J. Malloy  
Bishop of Rockford  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace