



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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May 21, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Recently I wrote to you to protest the Israeli decision to seize land in the Cremisan Valley that would separate a Salesian monastery from a Salesian convent and both religious institutions from their lands. This time, as Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to commend you for your vigorous efforts to re-engage the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and your frequent trips to this region to stimulate positive action in the peace process.

During a trip to Baghdad in March 2013 for the installation of the new Chaldean Patriarch, I met many Catholic bishops from the Middle East. They argued that the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a significant underlying source of tension in the Middle East. It was even their perceptions that one-sided U.S. support of Israel led to insufficient attention to the legitimate concerns of Arab nations and actions that undermine the two-state solution. To be sure, Palestinian actions and violence also undermine peace, but in their view, the United States has allowed the continued encroachment of Israeli settlements and the separation barrier on Palestinian lands. I share these perceptions with you to highlight the impact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is having on U.S. relations in the entire region. If Christian leaders articulate such perceptions, it is clear that the failure to resolve the conflict is a major challenge for U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Having shared this, I want to reiterate our support for a two-state solution, a secure and recognized Israel living in peace with an independent and viable Palestinian state. We recognize that actions by both Palestinians and Israelis have served to perpetuate an unsustainable status quo that is dangerous to both peoples and to the Middle East.

We encourage your efforts to bring the two parties together, to have each adopt measures that would make long-term progress toward peace and reconciliation possible, and to hold both parties accountable for building a just and lasting peace. The U.S. bishops are committed to doing all that we can to support such an effort.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace