



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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March 1, 2006

The Honorable Henry Hyde
Chairman
Committee on International Relations
US House of Representatives
Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2170
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hyde:

As your Committee addresses US policy toward the Palestinians in light of the recent parliamentary elections, I want to share with you perspectives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Achieving a just and lasting peace in this region should be among the highest priorities of our nation. The long and bitter conflict between Israelis and Palestinians requires a peaceful settlement that can ensure justice and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. The recent victory of Hamas, the illness and incapacitation of Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and the upcoming Israeli elections present new and formidable challenges for peace in the region.

These new realities present challenges but they also offer opportunities for all parties to make a firm commitment to peace. We strongly urge the Palestinian leaders to clearly and unequivocally recognize the right of Israel to exist within secure borders; that all parties renounce the use of terrorism and violence to achieve their political goals; and that all parties commit themselves to seek a viable two state solution, an aspiration shared by both Israelis and Palestinians as well as the international community. Likewise, we also urge all parties to respect human rights and religious freedom.

We continue to urge all leaders in the region to pursue “the road map,” to commit to work toward two viable states living in peace and security and to not take actions which delay or threaten these goals. Understanding that it will take some time for new governments to be formed and to clarify their policies, we believe it is essential that humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people be continued and that a decision about aid to the new Palestinian government not be made until the policies of the new government become clear.

Therefore, we do not believe it would be wise or just to withhold aid to the Palestinian people at large or punish them for the possible actions of their political leaders. Poverty and unemployment are still far too prevalent and a significant loss of funds for help for the Palestinian people can only add to their desperate plight and possibly lead to further unrest. We strongly urge the United States, the European Union and others to find appropriate and effective means to deliver urgently needed aid to the Palestinian people.

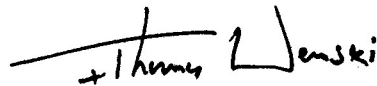
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Non-governmental organizations have a long history of helping the world's most vulnerable people. Their humanitarian role should be respected. While this work is not easy, it is essential. It deserves Congress' continued support.

The situation in the Holy Land has become increasingly complex, but we cannot abandon the people of Israel or the Palestinians. Strong, active and persistent US leadership is essential to restraining and assisting both parties to the conflict to bring about the goal of the road map—two states living in peace and security. We continue to work together with religious leaders in the Jewish, Moslem and other Christian communities to help our sisters and brothers in the Holy Land live in peace and safety. We renew our offer to work with you, your Committee and the US government to advance these common goals.

Thank you for your attention to our views.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International
Policy