

**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative
for Peace in the Middle East
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November 1, 2007

The Honorable Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We write on behalf of Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East to reaffirm the support we expressed in our meeting with you on January 29 for high level U.S. efforts to achieve Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. We appreciate the opportunity for regular meetings with Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns. Our sense of urgency related to preparations for the Annapolis peace conference leads us to write to you in advance of our next scheduled meeting with Under Secretary Burns on Friday, November 9.

We support the United States convening a conference for peace and providing leadership in negotiations for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, and for peace agreements between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. We have noted reports of concerns about preparations for the conference and believe more assertive U.S. leadership is needed in the lead-up to the conference to improve conditions on the ground and to reach agreement on principles for resolving final status issues.

In relation to improving conditions on the ground to restore hopes for peace among Palestinians and Israelis, we believe important steps include working for an end to all violent attacks and counter attacks by achieving a comprehensive ceasefire, pressing the Palestinian Authority to confiscate illegal weapons and disband militias, and pressing Israel to freeze expansion of settlements and ease movement for Palestinians in the West Bank by reducing the number of military checkpoints. We believe the United States can and should press harder for these and other steps in the lead-up and immediate follow-up to the Annapolis conference. We pledge our public support for your efforts in these matters.

We appreciate your encouragement of and personal involvement in accelerated talks between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to reach agreement on a statement of principles for resolving final status issues, including borders and security arrangements, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem.

It is widely known that substantive benchmarks and ideas for resolving the final status issues have been developed by Israelis and Palestinians in official and unofficial negotiations over many years, including particularly in talks authorized by Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat in 1995-96. These Israeli-Palestinian ideas are reflected in several public documents, including the "Taba agreement," the People's Voice Initiative, and the Geneva Accord. For the last several years, public opinion polls consistently have reported that majorities of Israelis and Palestinians would likely accept a peace agreement along these lines. We are confident that substantial majorities in our U.S.

religious communities also support these ideas. As preparations for the Annapolis conference go forward and you work to bridge the gaps between Israeli and Palestinian positions, we urge your support for these Israeli-Palestinian ideas for resolving the final status issues, including a mutually acceptable just solution of the refugee problem and an agreement for sharing Jerusalem.

Appreciating that the Arab Peace Initiative represents an historic positive development in the history of this conflict, we believe participation by Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries in the peace conference is very important. In addition to the conference achieving major substantive progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace, we hope it will also result in agreement on renewing negotiations for comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, including restarting negotiations between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon.

In our December '06 consensus statement, "Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace: From Crisis to Hope," we said that new dangers in the region also created new opportunities and increased urgency for achieving peace. In this context, there is heightened interest and concern in the Middle East, in our country and worldwide for success of the U.S. hosted peace conference and fears for the implications if the conference were to fail.

We pledge our public support for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership for peace in the coming weeks and months, and we would welcome an opportunity to meet again with you and/or with the President to express our support in a timely way.

Respectfully,

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative
for Peace in the Middle East