



**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative  
for Peace in the Middle East  
Letter to President Obama**

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 44<sup>th</sup> 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\*  
Dr. Carl Sheingold, Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation\*  
Rabbi Toba Spitzer, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly\*

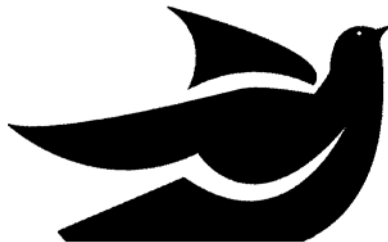
Rabbi Brant Rosen, Immediate Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly\*  
Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly\*  
Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Vice President, A Different Future\*  
Rabbi Merle S. Singer, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Beth El, Boca Raton, Florida\*

**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



Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3000  
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**National Interreligious Leadership  
Initiative for Peace in the Middle East  
A Window of Hope for the Peace of Jerusalem:  
Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders Call for Urgent U.S. Leadership**

Our faith traditions teach that every person is created by the one God and deserving of respect. This common religious heritage – which we trace to Abraham – finds expression in a common commitment to peace with justice for all God’s children.

For the past five years we have worked together for a two-state solution that will bring both Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace, based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, and the peace of Jerusalem. As religious leaders in the United States, we have prayed for peace, made public statements, met with public officials, and stood in solidarity with the religious leaders in Israel, the Palestinian Territories and throughout the region.

Despite tragic violence and discouraging developments, 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 in the Arab Peace Initiative. The United States convened the international community at Annapolis to support a renewed peace process. Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian negotiations have made progress. Official and informal negotiations have produced the outlines of concrete compromises for resolving the conflict, including the difficult issues of refugees and Jerusalem. Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders both here and in the region reject the killing of innocents, support a just peace, and believe sustained negotiations are the only path to peace. We are encouraged by the work of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land.

We cannot deny that there have been serious setbacks. Palestinian rocket attacks, combined with threats from Iran, revive fears for the survival of Israel. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Israeli checkpoints, outposts and continued expansion of settlements cause Palestinians to question whether a two-state solution remains possible. The strength of extremists in all three religious traditions, the split between Gaza and the West Bank, the political weakness of Palestinian and Israeli leadership, and the transition to a new Administration in the United States compound the challenges of peacemaking. There is a real danger that cynicism will replace hope and that people will give up on peace.

This dangerous time demands clarity. So let us be clear. As religious leaders, we remain firmly committed to a two-state solution to the conflict as the only viable way forward. We believe that concerted, sustained U.S. leadership for peace is essential. And we know that time is not on the side of peace, that delay is not an option.

The path to peace shuns violence and embraces dialogue. This path demands reciprocal steps that build confidence. This path can lead to a future of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace with security and dignity for both peoples and stability in the region.

As we have said in previous statements, the United States has a unique and indispensable role which gives our nation a special responsibility to pursue peace. Israeli-Palestinian peace must be an urgent priority for President-elect Obama from the day he takes office. Achieving Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace will have positive reverberations in the region and around the

world. Our nation and the world will be much safer with the achievement of the peace of Jerusalem.

We refuse, now and always, to give into cynicism or despair. We are people of hope. We call upon the members of our religious communities to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to urge our political leaders to advance a two-state solution with vigor both now and in the early months of the new Administration. The time for peace is now.

November 2008

## **Endorsers of Consensus Statement**

### **Christian Leaders:**

His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, President, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops\*

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington \*

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\*

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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)\*

Ann B. Sherer, Bishop, The United Methodist Church\*

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

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Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University\*

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

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