



## **Guidelines for Supporting the National Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East**

The following guidelines are offered for speaking (or writing) in support of the statements of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative with members of Congress and/or representatives of the media.

**STAY ON MESSAGE.** Keep focused on the unprecedented interreligious composition and timeliness of this initiative and on the main points of the statement, “Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace: From Crisis to Hope.”

Don't address issues which we have not discussed or agreed on. It's perfectly appropriate to say, "We have not discussed that and therefore I have no comment on it."

Emphasize that your local effort is part of a multi-city initiative in cooperation with heads of twenty-eight national Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious organizations.

The cities so far where religious leaders have endorsed the Interreligious Initiative's statements and taken some action together modeled on the National Initiative include: Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte and Durham, North Carolina, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Hartford-New Haven, Houston, Indianapolis, Central Long Island, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Philadelphia, Portland, Oregon, San Antonio, San Francisco, Seattle, Toledo, Washington, DC, and Wilmington, DE.

### **The Main Points of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative:**

**1) To make Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace an urgent, top priority of U.S. policy.** The United States has an inescapable responsibility and an indispensable role to provide creative, determined leadership for building a just peace for all in the Middle East by advancing the goal of a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, with security and peace for both peoples.

**2) Explore bold initiatives for peace such as appointing a special envoy, hosting an international conference, and/or forming mutually acceptable security arrangements for a negotiated two-state solution.** U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397 (supporting a two-state solution) provide the internationally agreed framework for comprehensive and lasting Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1701 and 1559 provide a framework for resolving the situation in Lebanon.

**While we are not experts in diplomacy, the Initiative has made several specific suggestions for the U.S. role:**

**a. Negotiate a timetable for specific, simultaneous steps to be taken by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, with effective and highly visible monitoring to assure implementation by both sides.**

*A timetable for simultaneous steps by both sides and an effective monitoring system are essential. The idea of insisting that all violence stop before starting negotiations gives veto power to extremists. The idea that one side must take several steps before the other side takes any doesn't work. Steps have to be reciprocal and simultaneous. Effective monitoring is essential to assure implementation and to keep up momentum in the process.*

**b. Take the lead to mobilize increased international economic aid (with effective controls by a credible institution such as the World Bank) to build up the Palestinian Authority's capacity to provide security, prevent violent attacks on Israelis, and deliver humanitarian aid, vital services, and development assistance to the Palestinian people.**

*The process of increasing aid has begun but much more is needed. Substantial (carefully monitored) aid is needed to provide humanitarian relief, rebuild security forces under the central control of the Palestinian Authority, repair damaged infrastructure, and create desperately needed jobs.*

**c. Build upon principles, benchmarks and practical ideas for peace that emerged from earlier initiatives.**

*Helpful concepts can still be found in the Geneva Accord and People's Voice model peace agreements, as well as in the "Road Map." These benchmarks suggest realistic compromises for final status issues, including: borders and security arrangements, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem. Building public support for these ideas can help convince people that peace is possible and help our religious communities, the media, and political leaders focus on realistic solutions for peace.*

### **Conflict and Tensions Between Our Communities:**

In response to reporters questions about tensions between our communities in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we urge that your responses reflect the foundational "Principles of Cooperation" adopted by national leaders of the Interreligious Initiative. Note especially the second principle:

"Recognizing and appreciating the deep, precious bonds many of us have with different sides of this conflict and how these bonds sometimes cause us to have different and conflicting viewpoints, we believe our areas of agreement are more important than our disagreements, and we commit ourselves to work together conscientiously and sensitively to emphasize our common agenda for peace."

While various religious leaders in any of our three communities may at some time have made contentious, partisan statements related to the conflict, including justifying or seeming to justify killing of innocents, this does not rule out or invalidate our working together now based on agreed upon Principles of Cooperation and our united support our statements. After all, many Israelis and Palestinians who now are working together for peace in the past may well have participated in fighting against each other.

Indeed, this interreligious initiative takes inspiration from the more than 500 Israeli and Palestinian families of the Parents Circle (formerly the Bereaved Parents) who have lost family members in the conflict and now are committed to working together for peace and reconciliation.

These Israeli and Palestinian parents of kids who were killed set a high moral standard for all of us.

**Specific Issues in the Conflict:**

If reporters ask questions about specific issues, e.g Palestinian tensions and reform, suicide bombings, the security “fence,” or “wall,” settlements, etc., we advise that you decline to discuss specific issues, focusing back on the main message and points of the statement, “Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace: From Crisis to Hope.”

If you decide you need to respond, we ask that you be guided closely by the Principles of Cooperation and the language in the “Twelve Steps for Peace” adopted unanimously by the national leaders of the Initiative at its inception.

Remember you are not simply responding for yourself or your organization, but for a new and still fragile interreligious Jewish/Christian/Muslim initiative. Think how a particular question or issue may be viewed by your colleagues for peace in the other two communities.

**Emphasize Actions You Are Taking or Plan to Take:**

- Communicating your support of the Initiative’s statements to your Senators and Representative.
- Joining with other endorsers to seek appointments with your Senators.
- Announcing the Initiative and distributing materials from the National Initiative to congregations.
- Urging members of congregations who support the Initiative to write to their Senators and Representative.
- Planning a public interreligious community event for peace.

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