



National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

On December 2, 2003, in a widely reported national press conference, thirty-three of the nation's most prominent Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders announced a new, unprecedented collaborative effort to mobilize broad public support for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in pursuit of Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. The leaders sent letters to President Bush and to every member of Congress. In June, 2004 a delegation of the national leaders met with Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Since its creation, the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East has sent several letters to President Bush, former Secretary Colin Powell, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to call for stronger U.S. leadership for peace. These appeals urge the Administration to make Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace a top priority of U.S. policy. Simultaneously, these appeals have been endorsed by local Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders in cities across the country where local interreligious initiatives are organized modeled on the national initiative. Local religious leaders have pressed their Senators and Representatives to support the Initiative's message.

In his New York Times religion column (12/6/03), "Mideast Initiative Pushes Beyond Platitudes," Peter Steinfels wrote that what makes the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative different is "who these religious leaders are, what they said, and what they plan to do."

In December 2006, in the wake of a particularly turbulent year for Israelis and Palestinians the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative issued the statement, "Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace: From Crisis to Hope." This statement represented a remarkable consensus, especially considering the tragic events of the past year, and again called upon the United States to make peace a priority in the Middle East. The statement was sent to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice requesting a meeting to discuss the situation in the Middle East. On January 29, 2007 leaders from the Initiative met with Secretary Rice to express their concerns and to offer their support for strong U.S. leadership for peace.

Who Are the Religious Leaders?

Christian leaders include two Roman Catholic Cardinals, the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Primate of the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, heads of the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Methodist, United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Protestant denominations, the President of the National Council of Churches, three other prominent Christian evangelical leaders, and editors of influential national Christian publications.

Jewish leaders include the President and Executive Vice President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Executive Vice President of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the President and Past President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, the Rector of the University of Judaism, the President of the Union for Reform Judaism, the Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, the Executive Vice President of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, the Vice President of A Different Future, a Member of the Council for a Parliament of World Religions, and the Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Muslims leaders include leaders of the largest national Muslim organizations – the National Director and Vice President of the Islamic Society of North America, the General Secretary of the Islamic Circle of North America, the President Emeritus of the Council of Mosques, the Muslim Chaplain of Georgetown University, and leaders of United Muslims of America and the American Society for Muslim Advancement.

What They Are Saying - "Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace: From Crisis to Hope"

In their December 2003 consensus statement, “Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace: From Crisis to Hope,” the religious leaders call for the United States to make peace in the Middle East an urgent priority. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders are united in working together for peace with justice for Israelis, Palestinians and all peoples in the Middle East. The leaders believe that America has an inescapable responsibility and an indispensable role to provide creative, determined leadership for building a just peace for all in the Middle East. They believe that achieving Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace will have positive reverberations in the region and around the world.

The leaders also state that military action will not resolve the conflict. The only authentic way forward is a negotiated settlement built on difficult, but realistic, compromises and security arrangements with international guarantees. The path to peace requires a rejection of violence and an embrace of dialogue. This path demands reciprocal steps that build confidence on all sides. Such a path could lead to a future of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace with security and dignity for both peoples and to a future of stability in the region with Israel living in peace and security with its Arab neighbors.

What They Plan To Do and What You Can Do

- Call the President (202) 456-1111 or E-Mail: President@whitehouse.gov and your Senators and Representative to voice support for the statements of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative and urge the U.S government to make peace in the Middle East an urgent priority.
- Utilize church, synagogue and mosque newsletters, e-mail lists and websites to build a broad, interfaith public voice for peace. Urge your congregation/community to endorse the Initiative and help communicate its message to the White House and Congress.
- Publicize Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives, e.g. sponsor a forum on the Geneva Accord, People's Voice, and/or One Voice.
- Join or help create a local interreligious initiative with local religious leaders, modeled on the national initiative. Call (360) 652-4285 or E-Mail usicpme@aol.com for help in forming a local initiative.



Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3000
Please feel free to copy and distribute