January 23, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of churches and Christian institutions in the United States, we bring you greetings for the New Year and encouragement as you meet the challenges that face our nation and the global community. Even though we are from a wide range of Christian traditions – Orthodox, Catholic, mainstream and evangelical Protestants – we stand close together in our hopes and prayers for peace in the land we all call Holy and for the reconciliation of the children of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims.

We come to you with two interrelated appeals that are central to our faith-motivated quest for peace with justice. First, we ask that you make Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace initiative, an urgent priority for your Administration. We recognize the great many difficulties and struggles that the people of the Middle East region must confront and the heavy responsibilities that fall upon you to help restore hope for a better future for them and for the citizens of the United States. We know that many view the Israeli-Palestinian situation as the most intractable in our troubled world, but we know that when it is resolved, the positive repercussions will go well beyond that small geographic area.

We commend your vision of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state living as a peaceful neighbor alongside the state of Israel, with both nations secure and recognized by their neighbors. With your active engagement, this vision could reignite a passion for peace that can overcome the appeal of violence, vengeance and exclusivity. The United States and the world will become safer as confidence grows that the U.S. is willing to take leadership and work cooperatively with the United Nations and other nations to resolve this conflict.

We bring to you our deepening concern for the welfare and future of the Palestinian Christian community. A small but vital part of the Palestinian society, Christians are rapidly emigrating to countries where they can gain the economic and physical security that is denied all Palestinians living under occupation. The future of the Palestinian Christians requires a solution to the conflict that will allow both peoples – Israelis and Palestinians - to live side-by-side in two states where all enjoy justice, peace and security.

The Palestinian Christian leaders have asked us to bring to your attention the very grave situation of Jerusalem. They remind us that Jerusalem is the location of “not only historical memories and sacred places of pilgrimage, but also living communities of believers.” With the construction by Israel of the separation barrier, many of the faithful – both Christians and Muslims – are excluded from the Holy City, and Jerusalem is severed from Bethlehem. Our second appeal is for you to work with Israelis, Palestinians and the international community to guarantee access to Jerusalem’s Holy Places and religious liberty for all peoples. Resolving the status of Jerusalem is key to achieving a workable two-state solution.
Mr. President, as this New Year begins, we encourage you to maintain the faith, the courage and the resolve to work with other world leaders toward negotiations that guarantee two viable and secure states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side and sharing Jerusalem. For guidance we look to the examples of the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah who declared that God calls all nations and all people to do justice to one another. We join in praying for peace in the Holy Land and at home.

Sincerely,

The Most Rev. Archbishop Barsamian  
Primate, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)

+Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos  
Ecumenical Officer, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski  
Chairman, Committee on Int’l Policy, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson  
Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori  
Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church

Are joined by:

The Rt. Rev. Wayne Burkette  
President, Provincial Elders’ Conference, Moravian Church in America, Southern Province

Simone Campbell, SSS  
Executive Director, NETWORK

Tony Campolo  
Founder, Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education

Sister Mary Dacey, SSJ  
President, Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Marie Dennis  
Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Rev. Robert Edgar  
General Secretary, National Council of Churches

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson  
General Secretary, Reformed Church in America

Ken Hackett  
President, Catholic Relief Services

Rev. Dr. Stan Hastey  
Executive Director, Alliance of Baptists

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie  
President, Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rev. Michael E. Livingston  
Executive Director, International Council of Community Churches, President, National Council of Churches
Albert C. Lobe
Interim Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee

Ambassador Robert A. Seiple
Former Ambassador-at-Large for
International Religious Freedom

E. Earl McCloud, Jr. Bishop
Office of Ecumenical & Urban Affairs
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Ronald J. Sider
President
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Rev. John L. McCullough
Executive Director & CEO
Church World Service

Rev. William G. Sinkford
President
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Mary Ellen McNish
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Msgr. Robert L. Stern
Secretary General, CNEWA
President, Pontifical Mission for Palestine

A. Roy Medley
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches U.S.A.

The Rev. John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Richard J. Mouw
President
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David Neff
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The Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins
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Br. Mark Schroeder, OFM
President, Franciscan Friars (OFM)
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Corinne Whitlatch
Executive Director
Churches for Middle East Peace

Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba)
Primate
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America

Bishop Gabino Zavala
Bishop President
Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement