

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

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director
NETWORK

Rev. Dr. Stan Hastey
Executive Director
Alliance of Baptists

Tony Campolo
Founder
Evangelical Association for the Promotion of
Education

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

Sister Mary Dacey, SSJ
President
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Very Rev. Dominic Izzo, OP
President, Catholic Conference of
Major Superiors of Men's Institutes

Marie Dennis
Director
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Rev. Phillip L. Jones
Director, Washington Office
Church of the Brethren

Rev. Robert Edgar
General Secretary
National Council of Churches

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

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

Rev. Michael E. Livingston
Executive Director,
International Council of Community Churches
President, National Council of Churches

Albert C. Lobe

Interim Executive Director
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E. Earl McCloud, Jr. Bishop

Office of Ecumenical & Urban Affairs
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. John L. McCullough

Executive Director & CEO
Church World Service

Mary Ellen McNish

General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

A. Roy Medley

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Primate
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America

Ambassador Robert A. Seiple

Former Ambassador-at-Large for
International Religious Freedom

Ronald J. Sider

President
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Rev. William G. Sinkford

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Msgr. Robert L. Stern

Secretary General, CNEWA
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The Rev. John H. Thomas

General Minister and President
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Corinne Whitlatch

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Churches for Middle East Peace

Bishop Gabino Zavala

Bishop President
Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement