

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

New Hope for the Peace of Jerusalem: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders Support U.S. Leadership for Peace September 29, 2010

Our faith traditions teach that every person is created by the one God and deserving of respect. This common religious heritage finds expression in our common commitment to peace with justice for all.

With the support and engagement of the United States, earlier this month, direct negotiations resumed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority with the goal of reaching agreement within one year. It is imperative that the peace talks continue. While we have long supported a halt to all settlement expansion, we support the United States working with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to reach a mutually acceptable agreement that will allow the negotiations to continue. We stand united in support of active, fair, and firm U.S. leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. Two years ago, we issued a statement on “a window of hope.” Today we declare there is “New Hope for the Peace of Jerusalem.” It will be difficult to achieve, but peace is possible.

Since 2003 we have worked together for a two-state solution that will bring Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace within the framework of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397. As religious leaders in the United States, we have prayed for peace, made public statements, met with public officials, and stood in solidarity with 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. There are U.S. diplomatic efforts to restart Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese negotiations for peace. Official and informal negotiations have produced the outlines of concrete compromises for resolving the conflict, including the final status issues: borders and security, settlements, 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.

As we said two years ago, there is a real danger that cynicism will replace hope and that people will give up on peace. With the resumption of direct negotiations, clarity is demanded. 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 a viable, independent Palestine, living side by side in peace with security and dignity for both peoples, stability in the region, and a comprehensive peace between Israel and all her Arab neighbors.

The United States has a unique and indispensable role which gives our nation a special responsibility to pursue peace. 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 support active, fair, and firm U.S. leadership to advance comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The time for peace is now.

Christian Leaders:

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington
Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace, USCCB
Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Director, Ecumenical Affairs, Armenia Orthodox Church in America
Fr. Mark Arey, Director, Office of Ecumenical Affairs, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Reverend Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ USA
The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church
Rev. Geoffrey Black, 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, 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
Rev. John M. Buchanan, Editor and Publisher, Christian Century
David Neff, Editor in Chief and Vice-President, Christianity Today

Jewish Leaders:

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President, Union of Reform Judaism
Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Peter Knobel, Past President, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University
Dr. Carl Sheingold, Former Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly

Muslim Leaders:

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America
Imam Mohamed Magid, President, Islamic Society of North America
Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain, Georgetown University, Clergy Beyond Borders
Dawud Assad, President Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA
Eide Alawan, Interfaith Office for Outreach, Islamic Center of America
Iftekhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America

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