

# **National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East**

## **Twelve Urgent Steps For Peace**

**December 12, 2003**

We are Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders committed to working together for peace between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab states. We are encouraged by evidence that majorities of Israelis and Palestinians accept that what they need most - real security for Israelis and the end of occupation for Palestinians - cannot be achieved by violence, but only by negotiations. We are encouraged by the civil society initiatives for peace, including the peace agreement signed in Geneva. We believe peace between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states is possible and that determined U.S. leadership is absolutely essential for pursuing the Road Map, for progress in the global campaign against terrorism and for the future of world peace.

The National Interreligious Leadership Delegation is seeking meetings with President Bush and other senior Administration officials to advocate the following urgent steps for peace. At the same time, the delegation will also advocate in a non-partisan way with all members of Congress and with other elected officials. The delegation is committed in the coming months to utilizing the full communication capacities of our organizations to generate a broad active nationwide constituency to make peace in the Middle East a top priority of U.S. policy.

We believe U.S. determination to pursue full implementation of the Road Map, including insistence on the following specific steps, would be supported by large majorities in all our communities, by majorities of Israelis and Palestinians; and would win moral and political support worldwide.

Note: The Walk the Road to Peace ([www.walktheroadtopeace.org](http://www.walktheroadtopeace.org)) interfaith campaign which organized the National Interreligious Leadership initiative will organize a series of additional activities over the coming months, including joint speaking tours for Israeli and Palestinian peace advocates and advocacy with members of Congress and candidates locally and in Washington, DC in March 2004 in support of full implementation of the Road Map. Walk the Road to Peace is a collaborative effort of A Different Future ([www.adifferentfuture.org](http://www.adifferentfuture.org)), the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East ([usicpme.org](http://usicpme.org)), and the United Religions Initiative ([uri.org](http://uri.org)) with assistance from the public relations firm of Ruder Finn and initial financial support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

### **Urgent Steps Needed on the Road to Peace**

The United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should immediately take the following steps to renew momentum on the Road Map -

1. Strongly reiterate the Road Map's unequivocal call for an end to all acts of violence and work actively with the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli Government and Arab states to achieve and maintain a ceasefire agreement.

Comment: Ending violent attacks and counter attacks is essential to making progress on the Road Map. During the several week period following the Aqaba Summit when there were no violent attacks the Road Map began to develop traction and people on both sides began to believe that the Road Map could work. The United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should work actively with the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli Government and the Arab states to avoid any further escalation of violence and to achieve a ceasefire agreement, including an effective system for monitoring and publicizing violations by either side.

2. Exercise active, determined U.S. and Quartet engagement, including consistent, visible presence of the special Presidential Envoy and larger scale, public monitoring of implementation required by both sides.

Comment: Given the legacy of three years of violent confrontation, the level of mistrust between the parties, and the pressures on Israeli and Palestinian leaders, there is need for active high level, public engagement by the United States and the Quartet, including consistent, visible presence of the special Presidential Envoy, in pressing for implementation of steps required by both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government. The monitoring system for measuring implementation needs to be larger, more vigorous and visible.

3. Determine with more specificity steps which each side must take and set a timetable for taking them. (See below for Specific Steps to be taken by the Palestinian Authority and Israel.)

Comment: The Road Map is clear in calling for parallel and simultaneous steps by each side to begin to address the core concerns of the other side. The United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should spell out specific steps each side must take, along with an explicit timetable for taking them. Monitors should report publicly on the performance of each party in relation to these expectations.

4. Support benchmarks for possible mutually acceptable solutions based on the principles and ideas generated in earlier negotiations and in current Israeli-Palestinian civil society projects, such as the Nusseibeh-Ayalon initiative and the Geneva Accord.

Comment: Reflecting the vision articulated by President Bush on June 24, 2002, the Road Map's goal is the emergence (by the year 2005) of a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state living side by side in peace with the Jewish state of Israel. The Road Map views progress toward this goal as "a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks." The goal of comprehensive Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace requires that the United States and the Quartet work to restart negotiations on all tracks. The principles and

ideas discussed in formal and informal negotiations (Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Taba, Egypt in 2000-01 and currently in the civil society projects such as the Nusseibeh-Ayalon initiative and the Geneva Accord; and Israeli-Syrian negotiations at Wye, Maryland in 1995) provide important hopeful benchmarks for possible mutually acceptable solutions. Focusing public attention on these ideas can help allay fears on both sides and build support in the Middle East and here for realistic compromises on crucial, sensitive issues, including security, refugees and the future of Jerusalem.

## **Specific Steps for the Palestinian Authority**

The United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should insist that the Palestinian Authority -

1. Continue and deepen the process of democratic reforms and financial accountability.

Comment: It is essential for progress in negotiations and for the future of a Palestinian state that the process of democratic reform and financial accountability continue, including support for a Prime Minister and Cabinet level ministers with real authority, the development of a constitution, free press, free and fair elections, consolidation of security forces, and progress on other judicial, administrative and economic benchmarks, as established by the International Task Force on Palestinian Reform. The U.S. and Quartet should adopt a realistic, balanced approach of pressing for continuing the democratic reform process, while not appearing to dictate the choice of leadership for the Palestinian people.

2. Take effective action to halt violent attacks against Israelis, punish those who commit any such acts, and gain commitments from all factions to cooperate in implementing the Road Map.

Comment: The Palestinian suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism not only are morally indefensible and generate tremendous fear, frustration and anger among Israelis, but also have very seriously hurt the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people. The new Palestinian Prime Minister, the Interior Minister and the Palestinian Authority as a whole must find ways to prevent these attacks and to gain agreement from all Palestinian factions on supporting, or at least not interfering with, the steps required by Palestinians in implementing the Road Map.

3. Cooperate with regional and international efforts to cut-off aid to and dismantle those groups which persist in planning or carrying out acts of violence against Israelis.

Comment: The Palestinian Authority should consider individuals or groups which persist in planning or carrying-out violent attacks against Israelis to be illegal and against the fundamental interests of the Palestinian people. In such cases, the Palestinian Authority should cooperate with international efforts to

cut-off any funds to such individuals or organizations, and effectively dismantle those organizations.

4. U.S., regional, and international support and (effectively monitored) economic aid should be increased to bolster the Palestinian central authority's capacity to consolidate and strengthen its security forces, prevent terrorist attacks; and to deliver humanitarian aid, vital services, and development assistance to the Palestinian people.

Comment: Three years of violent attacks, counter-attacks and military reoccupation have taken a terrible toll on the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to provide security or vital social services. Increased U.S. and international (effectively monitored) economic aid is essential to rebuilding and enabling the Palestinian Authority to carry out its responsibilities in implementation of the Road Map, including consolidating security forces, preventing terrorist attacks and becoming the reliable, primary source of services and aid to the Palestinian people.

## **Specific Steps for the Israeli Government**

Simultaneously, the United States, in coordination with the Quartet, should insist that the Israeli Government –

1. Take effective action to dismantle all unauthorized settlement outposts established since March 2002 and freeze expansion of existing settlements.

Comment: The Israeli government's continued support for expansion of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza is a major threat to the viability of a future Palestinian state, directly undermines Palestinian confidence in the peace process, compounds Israeli security problems, and represents an additional economic burden on a seriously hurting Israeli economy.

2. Exercise measures, such as lifting curfews and easing restrictions on movement within the West Bank and Gaza, to improve the humanitarian situation of Palestinians.

Comment: Reports have documented the terrible humanitarian crisis Palestinians face as a result of the three years of violent confrontation and reoccupation of Palestinian areas. There are measures which the Israeli Government can and should take, such as lifting curfews and easing restrictions on the movement of people and goods within the West Bank and Gaza, which would improve the humanitarian situation.

3. Halt construction of the Security "Fence" or "Wall" beyond the Green Line around settlements in areas which require confiscation of more Palestinian land and threaten the viability of a future Palestinian state.

Comment: It is understandable, even if it is no solution, that Israeli frustration over continued violent attacks by Palestinians led to support for building a Security "Fence" or "Wall" to separate Israel from the Palestinians in the West

Bank and Gaza. However, the actual and proposed route of the Wall is complicated by Israel's commitment to defend Jewish settlements. The Wall has been and is being constructed in some areas which require confiscation of more Palestinian land, effectively encage the local Palestinian population, and threaten the viability of a future Palestinian state.

4. In coordination with the Palestinian Authority demonstrating capacity to prevent violent attacks, withdraw Israeli military forces from areas reoccupied since September 2000.

Comment: As the Palestinian Authority demonstrates increased capacity to prevent violent attacks against Israelis, Israel should withdraw its military forces from areas reoccupied since September 2000. Achieving real security for Israelis and ending the occupation for Palestinians are the twin essentials for building peace. The United States needs to engage directly with the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority at a high level to develop specific steps and a timetable for this process.

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