

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

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**President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500**

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of twenty-eight national Jewish, Christian and Muslim organizations we appeal to you to make Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace an urgent, top priority of U.S. Middle East policy. A year ago we launched the National Interreligious Initiative calling for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in pursuit of full implementation of the Road Map to Peace. Now new opportunities for progress toward peace are opening.

At the Aqaba Summit you demonstrated the positive power of your leadership. As you have said publicly, now Palestinian elections and Israeli plans to withdraw from Gaza provide a new, important opportunity for restarting the peace process. We believe now is the time to pursue the road to peace with determination until the goal of a viable two-state solution is achieved.

For the sake of Israelis and Palestinians - for the sake of peace in the region and worldwide - negotiations must be restarted, the cycle of violence halted, and progress resumed toward the goal of a viable, independent, democratic Palestinian state along side the State of Israel with peace and security for both peoples. Continuing conflict is jeopardizing the prospect of a two-state solution and providing fuel for terrorism.

We believe U.S. leadership to achieve Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace will reduce support for terrorism, provide incentive in the region for democratic reform, economic development, and arms control, and offer a powerful precedent for resolution of conflict.

Majorities of Israelis and Palestinians desperately want the violence to end, not only because of the terrible toll in human life, but also because it is clear that peace with justice - that is, real security for Israelis and an end of occupation for Palestinians - can only be achieved by negotiations. There are hopeful signs that Lebanon and Syria also recognize the urgency of resuming negotiations.

Israelis and Palestinians, and Arab states need America's help. Determined U.S. leadership for peace is urgently needed now.

We appeal to you in the early days of your new Administration to appoint a special Presidential Envoy with a full-time commitment, in coordination with the European Union, Russian Federation, and U.N. Secretary General, to pursue negotiations based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397 for comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states.

Many of us have precious strong bonds with one side or the other in this conflict. While recognizing that

these bonds may cause us to have conflicting viewpoints, we believe our points of common agreement are more important than our disagreements. Both our faith and necessity command us to put aside our differences to work together for peace.

As religious leaders, we are clear on the moral and political imperative for active leadership on your part. While we acknowledge that we are not experts in the details of diplomacy and recognize the essential role of the parties themselves and your good office in developing next steps, we offer the following suggestions for the U.S. role:

-- Negotiate a timetable for specific, simultaneous steps to be taken by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, with effective and highly visible monitoring to assure implementation by both sides;

-- Take the lead, in light of possible Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, to mobilize increased international economic aid (with effective controls by a credible institution such as the World Bank) to buildup the Palestinian Authority's capacity to provide security, prevent violent attacks on Israelis, and deliver humanitarian aid, vital services, and development assistance to the Palestinian people; and

-- Support benchmark principles for possible mutually acceptable peace agreements drawn from earlier official negotiations and from civil society initiatives such as the People's Voice and the Geneva Accord.

MR. PRESIDENT, based on the deepest beliefs in our three Abrahamic religious traditions and on past progress and new opportunities, we believe peace is possible. And we believe determined U.S. leadership is essential for achieving peace.

We commit our prayers and active support for your efforts, and we will work to mobilize our communities' support nationwide.

We are sorry it has not been possible to arrange a meeting with you and Secretary of State Designate, Dr. Condoleezza Rice before your Inauguration, and we look forward to arranging such a meeting very early in your second term. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Bruce E. Wexler

Ronald J. Young
National Co-Coordinator

The Reverend Charles Gibbs

enc: List of National Leaders

CC: Secretary of State Colin L. Powell
Secretary of State Designate, Dr. Condoleezza Rice