

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

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**LEADERS OF TWENTY-FIVE JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
MAKE AN URGENT APPEAL TO PRESIDENT BUSH TO MAKE PEACE BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND
PALESTINIANS
AN IMMEDIATE TOP PRIORITY IN HIS SECOND TERM**

Leaders deliver an urgent appeal and seek a meeting with the President soon after the inauguration. They are mobilizing interreligious leadership in cities nationwide -- in light of the newly elected Palestinian leadership and Israeli plans to withdraw from Gaza -- they will pray and appeal to the President and members of Congress for immediate, fair and firm U.S. leadership to fulfill the vision of Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Washington, DC-January 13, 2005 -Thirty-five of the nation's most prominent Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders gathered today in Washington to announce a major Appeal to the President citing their united support for renewed U.S. leadership in the Middle East peace process. The religious leaders, heads of twenty-five national religious organizations, pledge that they will communicate through their networks nationwide to support immediate US leadership in advancing peace among Israelis and Palestinians as outlined in the Road Map

Simultaneously, local Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders in fifteen cities across the country including Atlanta Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Indianapolis, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Hartford-New Haven, Long Island, Baltimore, Charlotte, Durham and Washington, DC are today publicly endorsing this Appeal to the President and are committed to meet with their congressional representatives to generate bi-partisan support from Congress.

This broad based group of religious leaders views the election of new Palestinian leadership and Israeli plans to withdraw from Gaza as creating both an historic opportunity to accomplish a negotiated two state solution and a moral imperative for the President to exercise determined leadership to help realize that possibility. They see resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as an essential step in decreasing support for terrorism worldwide.

The religious leaders are members of an unprecedented collaboration among the three Abrahamic faiths know as the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East that formed in December 2003 and has grown since to include even more of the nation's religious leadership. They are building a national network of local interreligious leadership initiatives in cities across the country to act together in building a broad constituency to collectively and cooperatively advance the agenda of mutual understanding and leadership for peace on this issue that has divided our country as well as much of the world.

Christian leaders include two Roman Catholic Cardinals, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Primate of the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, heads of the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Methodist, United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Protestant denominations, President of the National Council of Churches, President of World Vision, three other prominent Christian evangelical leaders, and editors of the two of the most influential national Christian publications.

Jewish leaders include President and Executive Vice President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Executive Vice President of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, President of the

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Chancellor of the University of Judaism and the Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Muslims leaders include leaders of the largest national Muslim organizations - Secretary General of the Islamic Society of North America, General Secretary of the Islamic Circle of North America -- as well as head of The Mosque Cares, Imam of the Islamic Center of America, former President of the Council of Mosques, and leaders of United Muslims of America and American Sufi Muslim Association.

The religious leaders are united in support of a viable, independent, democratic Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, with enduring peace and security for both peoples. They seek an urgent meeting with President Bush to appeal for his leadership in the peace process; and they plan to work for bi-partisan Congressional support for a reinigorated and concerted U.S. led effort for rapid progress on the Road Map.

In their Appeal, the religious leaders offer four specific suggestions for the U.S. role:

** Appoint a Special Presidential Envoy with a full-time commitment to the region, in coordination with the European Union, Russian Federation and U.N. Secretary General, to immediately press ahead for full implementation of the Road Map and for comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states;

** 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. (The leaders agreed a year ago on "Twelve Steps for Peace" which they believe would have substantial support in all of their communities. See the website: www.walktheroadtopeace.org.);

** Take the lead, in light of Israeli plans to withdraw from Gaza, to mobilize increased international economic aid (with effective controls by a credible institution such as the World Bank) to build-up the Palestinian Authority's capacity to provide security, prevent violent attacks on Israelis, deliver humanitarian aid, vital services, and development assistance, including desperately needed jobs, for the Palestinian people.

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

The religious leaders conclude their Appeal by declaring,

"MR. PRESIDENT, based on the deepest beliefs in our three Abrahamic religious traditions and on past progress and current 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."

The National Interreligious Leadership Initiative was initiated by A Different Future (www.adifferentfuture.org), the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East (www.usicpme.org), and the United Religions Initiative (www.uri.org) with assistance from Ruder Finn public relations firm and financial support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Enc: List of the National Interreligious Leadership
Copy of the Appeal and Letter to the President

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