

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

## **A Window of Hope for the Peace of Jerusalem: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders Call for Urgent U.S. Leadership**

November 2008

Our faith traditions teach that every person is created by the one God and deserving of respect. This common religious heritage – which we trace to Abraham – finds expression in a common commitment to peace with justice for all God’s children.

For the past five years we have worked together for a two-state solution that will bring both Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace, based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, and the peace of Jerusalem. As religious leaders in the United States, we have prayed for peace, made public statements, met with public officials, and stood in solidarity with the 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. The United States convened the international community at Annapolis to support a renewed peace process. Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian negotiations have made progress. Official and informal negotiations have produced the outlines of concrete compromises for resolving the conflict, including the difficult issues of 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. We are encouraged by the work of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land.

We cannot deny that there have been serious setbacks. Palestinian rocket attacks, combined with threats from Iran, revive fears for the survival of Israel. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Israeli checkpoints, outposts and continued expansion of settlements cause Palestinians to question whether a two-state solution remains possible. The strength of extremists in all three religious traditions, the split between Gaza and the West Bank, the political weakness of Palestinian and Israeli leadership, and the transition to a new Administration in the United States compound the challenges of peacemaking. There is a real danger that cynicism will replace hope and that people will give up on peace.

This dangerous time demands clarity. 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 Palestine, living side by side in peace with security and dignity for both peoples and stability in the region.

As we have said in previous statements, the United States has a unique and indispensable role which gives our nation a special responsibility to pursue peace. Israeli-Palestinian peace must be an urgent priority for President-elect Obama from the day he takes office. 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.

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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 urge our political leaders to advance a two-state solution with vigor both now and in the early months of the new Administration. The time for peace is now.

### **Endorsers\* of Consensus Statement**

#### **Christian Leaders:**

His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, President, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, Primate, Greek Orthodox Church in America

His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate, Armenian Apostolic Church in America

Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, President, National Council of Churches of Christ USA

The Reverend Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ USA

Bishop Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop Episcopal Church

The Reverend John H. Thomas, 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)

Ann B. Sherer, Bishop, The 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

John Buchanan, Editor/Publisher, The Christian Century, Pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

David Neff, Editor and Vice-President, Christianity Today

#### **Jewish Leaders:**

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Rabbi Peter Knobel, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus, Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University

Dr. Carl Sheingold, Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Brant Rosen, Immediate Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Vice President, A Different Future

Rabbi Merle S. Singer, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Beth El, Boca Raton, Florida

#### **Muslim Leaders:**

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America

Imam Mohammed ibn Hagmagid, Vice President, Islamic Society of North America

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

Naeem Baig, Secretary General, Islamic Circle of North America

Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain, Georgetown University

Dawud Assad, President Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder, American Society for Muslim Advancement/Cordoba Initiative

Iftekhhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America

\*Organizations for Identification Only