

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

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For Immediate Release

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**JEWISH, CHRISTIAN & MUSLIM LEADERS SUPPORT PRESIDENT OBAMA'S
MAKING ARAB-ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE AN IMMEDIATE, HIGH
PRIORITY; URGE DIPLOMACY FOR A SUSTAINABLE CEASEFIRE
AND STEPS BY BOTH SIDES**

In a letter faxed to the White House today, Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI) pledged support for President Obama's "commitment to make Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace a high priority from the start of his Presidency." They commended him "for calling Arab and Israeli leaders on his first day in office and for appointing George Mitchell as special Middle East envoy, especially since NILI has called repeatedly for a special envoy." The religious leaders said, "Urgent U.S. diplomacy, in cooperation with Egypt and other parties is needed immediately to help assure that the cessation of violence by Hamas and Israel is maintained and developed into a truly effective and sustainable ceasefire." While acknowledging that their communities responded in different ways to the recent war between Hamas and Israel, the leaders declared that they are "united in support of the following elements as necessary to a sustainable ceasefire, including: Hamas' agreeing to stop all rocket attacks on Israel; international measures to prevent smuggling-resupply of rockets through the Sinai; Israel's agreeing to halt all military operations in Gaza, withdraw its forces, and open Gaza border crossings; and all parties' committing to provision of substantial humanitarian and economic assistance to the people of Gaza."

Referencing their November statement, "A Window of Hope for the Peace Jerusalem," the religious leaders said that "despite discouraging developments and tragic violence 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 with Israel in the historic Arab Peace Initiative.

Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian negotiations have made progress. Official and informal negotiations have produced principles and practical ideas for resolving the conflict, including the difficult issues of refugees and Jerusalem.”

The religious leaders believe active U.S. Leadership is needed “to encourage and support steps by both sides to restore hope for peace and renew momentum in peace negotiations.” Specifically, they said, “Building on a ceasefire agreement, the United States should insist that Israel fulfill its commitment to dismantle illegal outposts in the West Bank and halt all expansion of settlements. On the Palestinian side, the United States should support efforts to form a Palestinian government capable of representing the West Bank and Gaza and committed to rejecting violence and negotiating a two-state solution with Israel. Building on the Arab Peace Initiative, the United States should engage actively in promoting direct negotiations for peace between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.”

Citing their common religious commitment to “peace with justice for all of God’s children,” the religious leaders said, “We refuse, now and always, to give into cynicism or despair. We are people of hope.” The religious leaders pledged to call upon people in churches, synagogues and mosques across the country “to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to support President Obama in providing engaged U.S. leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. The time for peace is now.”

**Attachments: NILI 1/27/09 Letter to President Obama, with List of Endorsers
NILI 11/08 Statement, “A Window of Hope for the Peace of Jerusalem”**