

**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative
for Peace in the Middle East
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February 28, 2014

Secretary of State John Kerry
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to you on behalf of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI) that involves present and past heads of twenty-five Jewish, Christian, and Muslim national religious organizations. Several leaders of NILI were privileged to attend your briefing in Georgetown on the current status of negotiations for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

We look forward to continuing progress in the negotiations. We agree with you that public support by leaders and members of our three religious communities, both here and on the ground in the region, will be essential to encourage success in negotiating a final peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.

In this context, we request a meeting with you at an appropriate time to discuss how we can help here at home. We also would urge you to meet personally with religious leaders on the ground in Jerusalem, most importantly including leaders of the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land (CRIHL).

CRIHL includes the highest official local religious leaders who have consistently condemned incitement and hateful acts of vandalism against any holy sites. At its founding, these leaders declared that nothing in their three traditions justifies killing of innocents and in 2010 CRIHL wrote to Special Envoy George Mitchell supporting negotiations and reiterating “the importance of respecting the attachments of the three religions – Jewish, Christian and Muslim – in the holy land and especially in Jerusalem.”

We believe the coming months are critical to achieving a negotiated two-state peace agreement, the only realistic resolution of the conflict. While we know that some in our communities will oppose any compromises, as leaders of NILI we support benchmark principles and practical ideas developed in earlier official and informal negotiations that provide possible elements for necessary compromises on key issues that could be acceptable to majorities of Israelis and Palestinians.

We look forward to meeting with you and to working with you for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Respectfully,

List of endorsers follows -

NILI Letter to Secretary of State Kerry
February 2014
List of Endorsers

Christian Leaders:

Bishop Richard E. Pates, Chairman, USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace
Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington
Bishop Denis J. Madden, Auxiliary Bishop of Baltimore
Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, Director, Ecumenical Affairs, Armenian Orthodox Church in America
Archimandrite Nathanael Symeonides, Office of Ecumenical Affairs, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Jim Winkler, President/General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ USA
The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, Episcopal Church
Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Reverend Geoffrey Black, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ
Reverend Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister, President, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)
Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church
Bishop Neil I L. Irons, United Methodist Church
Richard Stearns, President, World Vision US
Reverend Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries, Board Member, World Vision US
David Neff, former Editorial Vice-President, Christianity Today
John M. Buchanan, Editor and Publisher, Christian Century

Jewish Leaders:

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Ph.D. Rector and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, American Jewish University
Rabbi Burt Visotzky
Rabbi Jason Klein, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Rabbi Peter Knobel, Past President, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Rabbi Emeritus, The Temple, Atlanta Georgia

Muslim Leaders:

Imam Mohammed Magid, President, Islamic Society of North America
Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America
Naeem Baig, Executive Director, Islamic Circle of North America
Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder of ASMA Society and the Cordoba Initiative
Imam Yahya Hendi, Founder and President, Clergy Beyond Borders
Dawud Assad, President Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA
Eide Alawan, Interfaith Office for Outreach, Islamic Center of America
Iftekhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance

*Organizations for Identification Only

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FOR MORE INFORMATION
Contact: Ron Young (425) 327-7545

**Jewish, Christian and Muslim Leaders Declare
Support from Religious Communities Essential to Achieving
Israeli-Palestinian Two-State Peace Agreement**

In a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry thirty-three leaders of Jewish, Christian and Muslim national religious organizations advocated that “public support by leaders and members of our three religious communities, both here and on the ground in the region, will be essential to encourage success in negotiating a final peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.” The leaders believe, “a negotiated two-state peace agreement (is) the only realistic resolution of the conflict.”

The leaders requested a meeting with Secretary Kerry at an appropriate time “to discuss how we can help” and they urged Kerry “to meet personally with religious leaders on the ground in Jerusalem, most importantly including leaders of the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land (CRIHL).”

While acknowledging “that some in our communities will oppose any compromises,” these leaders affirmed their support for “benchmark principles and practical ideas developed in earlier official and informal negotiations that provide possible elements for necessary compromises on key issues that could be acceptable to majorities of Israelis and Palestinians.”