

April 6, 2005

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

Thank you for your leadership and personal engagement in implementing President Bush's policy goal of a negotiated agreement that will lead to two independent, sovereign and viable states - Israel and Palestine. We are grateful that the raging violence has diminished and that hope for a political resolution is taking root among the Israeli and Palestinian people. We are particularly heartened by the President's statement in Brussels that a truly viable Palestinian state requires contiguous territory on the West Bank.

Churches for Middle East Peace has throughout its 20 year history viewed Jerusalem as a major issue at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. We see a negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on sharing Jerusalem as key to both resolving the political conflict and for a future reconciliation among the peoples of the region. We encourage the Administration in both private and public settings to firmly insist that Israel and Prime Minister Sharon, as well as the Palestinian Authority, comply with the Road Map and not take actions that prejudice final status negotiations on the status of Jerusalem, borders or settlements.

Open and free access that allows Palestinians, as well as visitors and pilgrims, to move freely between East Jerusalem and the cities and villages of the West Bank is essential for the viability of a future Palestinian state. We fear that certain actions and policies of the government of Israel threaten Palestinian presence and legitimacy in East Jerusalem and should be halted and reversed. Of particular and current concern to us are: 1) the

E-1 expansion plan; 2) the imminent approval of the construction of 3,500 housing units in and around Ma'aleh Adumim; 3) routing of the barrier beyond the Green Line in and around East Jerusalem; 4) the project at Rachel's tomb area in Bethlehem; 5) the effort to revoke the tax exemption accorded East Jerusalem-based church-agencies - Lutheran World Federation, Mennonite Central Committee and Catholic Relief Services.

Churches for Middle East Peace receives reports from Palestinian partner churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran), from American and international church-related institutions (such as Augusta Victoria Hospital, St. George's College and Bethlehem University) and from church-related development organizations (such as Catholic Relief Services and World Vision) of unrelenting hardship and oppression due to the ongoing occupation and the separation of East Jerusalem from the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza.

We echo the heads of churches in Jerusalem who in an Easter season letter wrote, "We believe in Jerusalem as a city of Peace shared by Muslims, Jews and Christians. We also believe that Jerusalem should serve as the capital for Palestine and Israel.... We are calling on both Israelis and Palestinians to see God in the other, accept the humanity of the other and recognize each other's human, civil, religious and political rights."

We stand with you and President Bush in recognizing the urgency of the moment, and the opportunity and responsibility that brings to our country's leaders and public.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of Churches for Middle East Peace

J. Daryl Byler, Chair

Stan DeBoe, OSST

Catherine Gordon

Jeanette Holt

Maureen Shea