

June 10, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush  
The White House  
Washington, DC  
Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of U.S. Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches and agencies, we commend and encourage your commitment to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to realize the vision of two democratic states living side-by-side in peace and security. With your firm leadership and direct engagement with the parties, we believe that Israeli and Palestinian leaders can achieve a final permanent status agreement through negotiations. Our churches and organizations are jointly urging members of Congress to give you bipartisan support in pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

We are grateful for your strong statements at the press conference following your meeting with Palestinian President Abbas, for your readiness to provide funds directly to the Palestinian Authority and for your commitment to stand by Mr. Abbas as he reforms Palestinian institutions, works to revive the economy and confronts those who seek to achieve their goals by resorting to violence. Both Mr. Abbas and Mr. Sharon face dangerous opposition to peacemaking from within and need your backing, and that of other international leaders, to make the difficult decisions that are necessary for the promise of the road map to be achieved. We encourage you to hold both peoples close to your heart, challenging and encouraging their leaders with an evenhanded firmness.

Your remarks about Israel's obligation not to prejudice final status negotiations with regard to Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem restored hope that Jews, Christians and Muslims might encounter each other in peace in the Holy City. But hope for Jerusalem and for peace cannot be sustained when it is contradicted by what Palestinians see - the expansion of settlements, the construction of the barrier on West Bank land, the undisturbed outposts on hilltops - and what they experience - being humiliated at checkpoints and prohibited from entering Jerusalem for prayer, business or family visits.

Prime Minister Sharon's decision to withdraw from Gaza is an important step toward ending the occupation. We urge you to maintain the momentum by working with the Quartet partners to bring the parties to the negotiating table as soon as possible. As you said, changes to the 1949 Armistice lines must be mutually agreed to. Yet, day by day, actions are taken that create facts on the ground that will make agreement more difficult on borders, settlements and Jerusalem. For the sake of the Israeli people and the Palestinian people, and for our own sake as well, this moment of opportunity for the widely shared goal of a two-state solution to the conflict must not be lost.

Please extend our appreciative greetings to the First Lady for visiting the region and for meeting with Palestinian women. We pray that peacemakers may have courage and perseverance and that zealots may put aside their animosities and be still for the sake of Jerusalem's peace and the future of all the children of the Holy Land.  
Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Stan Hastey  
Executive Director  
Alliance of Baptists

Mary Ellen McNish  
General Secretary  
American Friends Service Committee

Metropolitan Philip Saliba  
Primate  
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese  
of North America

Very Rev. Ronald D. Witherup, SS  
President  
Catholic Conference of Major  
Superiors of Men's Institutes

Rev. Dr. Wm. Chris Hobgood  
General Minister and President  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Stanley J. Noffsinger  
General Secretary  
Church of the Brethren General Board

Rev. John McCullough  
Executive Director & CEO  
Church World Service

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold  
Presiding Bishop  
The Episcopal Church in America

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bro. Mark Schroeder, OFM  
President  
Franciscan Friars (OFM)  
English Speaking Conference, JPIC Council

Joe Volk  
Executive Secretary  
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+Bishop Dimitrios Couchell  
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Rev. John H. Thomas  
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General Secretary  
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The United Methodist Church

The Rev. R. Randy Day  
General Secretary  
General Board of Global Ministries  
The United Methodist Church