

November 14, 2005

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice

Secretary of State

United States Department of State

Washington, DC 20520

Dear Dr. Rice:

We write as leaders of a broad spectrum of churches and church-related organizations to encourage U.S. leadership toward a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, with Jerusalem as their shared capital. We believe that you and the President, working cooperatively with the Quartet, have the power to bring both sides to the negotiating table. The security of Israelis and Palestinians depends on this happening - as does our own. Like you, we have heard and seen how Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, and especially East Jerusalem, is used to incite terrorists around the world.

Renewal of the tragic cycle of violence in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza underscores the fact that this is a time of deep concern and of fragile hope. Both President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon have taken significant steps toward peace. President Abbas has denounced violence in ways not matched by any other Palestinian leader and is seeking to build a credible democracy. Prime Minister Sharon has fulfilled his promise to withdraw settlers from the Gaza Strip. The United States must say clearly that these steps are beginnings, not ends. Any unilateral action, no matter how praiseworthy, only undermines the long term goal of a negotiated resolution that is durable and deemed to be legitimate.

We continue to believe that the President's vision of a viable, democratic state of Palestine living next to a secure Israel can be fulfilled, and we commend the Administration's recognition that Jerusalem is one of the final status issues that should not be prejudged. We urge you to ensure that Palestinians in East Jerusalem are able to participate fully in Palestinian legislative elections in January. The compliance of Israel to the President's insistence that building cease in the E1 area was a good sign. We are grateful that the Administration has continued to demand that settlement activity cease, and disappointed that Israel has ignored that request and other requirements of the Road Map.

Hope is difficult to sustain as Israel continues to block the movement of Palestinian people and goods. It is fundamentally important for both Israelis and Palestinians that a future Palestinian state is economically viable, and we applaud the efforts by envoy James Wolfensohn in that regard.

We are heartened by the fact that strong majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians support peace efforts and a two-state solution. We find strong support from our own members for the peace efforts as well. Our Washington-based staff report Congressional readiness for bipartisan support of an active, sustained push for peace. This convergence of opinion presents an opportunity that must not be missed.

We cannot emphasize enough the significance of this moment and the imperative of U.S. leadership. There is much to build on from previous efforts and nothing to be gained from further postponement. We offer our support and assistance, as well as our prayers, as you work toward resolution of this conflict and the building of bridges between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Stan Hasteley

Executive Director

Alliance of Baptists

Mary Ellen McNish

General Secretary

American Friends Service Committee

Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba)

Archbishop of NY and

Metropolitan of North America

Antiochian Orthodox Christian

Archdiocese of North America

Bishop Vicken Aykazian

Legate

Armenian Orthodox Church

Very Reverend Dominic Izzo, OP

President

Catholic Conference of Major

Superiors of Men's Institutes

Rev. Sharon E. Watkins

General Minister and President

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Stanley J. Noffsinger

General Secretary

Church of the Brethren

Rev. John L. McCullough

Executive Director

Church World Service

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold

Presiding Bishop and Primate

The Episcopal Church, USA

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson

Presiding Bishop

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Br. Mark Schroeder, OFM

President

Franciscan Friars (OFM)

English Speaking Conference

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Council

Joe Volk

Executive Secretary

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Bishop Dimitrios Couchell  
Ecumenical Officer  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Marie Dennis  
Director

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Dr. Robert Davis, PhD  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Central Committee

Rev. Robert Edgar

General Secretary

National Council of Churches USA

The Reverend Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson  
General Secretary  
Reformed Church in America

Rev. William G. Sinkford

President

Unitarian Universalist Association

of Congregations

Rev. John H. Thomas  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ

Bishop Peter Weaver

President

United Methodist Council of Bishops