

**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative
for Peace in the Middle East
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**Interfaith Delegation of American Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders
Travel, Pray Together and Meet with Jordanians, Israelis and Palestinians;
Delegation Asserts Urgency of U.S. Leadership in 2010 to Achieve Negotiated Peace**

Following a week of praying together and meeting Jordanians, Israelis and Palestinians, a delegation of 15 U.S. Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders returned home united in pursuit of peace, with a new, shared sense of urgency. They called for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in the New Year to restart negotiations for a two-state solution, involving an end to occupation and security for Israel and Palestine. They repeated NILI's goal to build on the Arab Peace Initiative for comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, including peace agreements between Israel and Syria and Lebanon. Leaders of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace (NILI) that organized the trip said they will seek high level meetings with the Obama Administration to offer their support for U.S. leadership for peace.

The delegation included Christian leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), National Baptist Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church, and United Methodist Church; Jewish leaders of Reform Judaism, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, and Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association; and Muslim leaders of the Islamic Society of North America, Clergy Beyond Borders, and the President Emeritus of the Council of Mosques. (The List of Participants follows below.)

Believing steps on the ground are needed to restore hope, the NILI delegation united in calling on the Obama Administration and Congress to be catalysts, in cooperation with Egypt and other parties, for achieving an effective, sustainable ceasefire, including international measures to prevent resupplying of rockets; for allowing the flow of urgently needed humanitarian and economic assistance to the people of Gaza; for continuing good efforts to improve the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to increase security and economic development; and for further reducing the number of checkpoints and freezing all settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington, DC, said, "We heard two messages repeatedly from Palestinians and Israelis with whom we met: first, that time is running out for a viable two-state

solution; and second, that people on both sides know the difficult compromises that will be necessary for peace and most people are prepared to accept them.” Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, added, “Even on the most emotional issues of refugees and Jerusalem, we believe most Palestinians understand that they will have to accept a negotiated solution regarding refugees that does not jeopardize the Jewish majority in Israel; and most Israelis understand that they will have to accept a negotiated solution regarding sharing Jerusalem that includes provision for both Israel and Palestine to have their capitals in Jerusalem.” Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director of the Islamic Society of North America, said, “Of course, it is the parties themselves that must make the negotiated agreements for peace, but most people we met believe that active, fully engaged U.S. leadership is essential to making that happen. We are united in support of such U.S. leadership for peace.”

The delegation of Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders were encouraged by negotiations for freeing Gilad Shalit, the young Israeli soldier captured by Hamas in 2006, in exchange for release of some number of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister, President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) said, “We all pray to the One, merciful God that these negotiations will succeed and that prisoners will be released; and we call on our government to work urgently to restart negotiations and move forward in 2010 toward Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace.”

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NILI Delegation – List of Participants December 2009

Christian Leaders

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick
Archbishop Emeritus of Washington

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, Chairman
Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Fr. Mark Arey, Director
Office of Ecumenical Affairs
Greek Orthodox Church in America

Cont'd

Dr. J. William Shaw, President
National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

Reverend Dr. Sharon Watkins
General Minister, President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Bishop Margaret Payne
ELCA New England Synod
ELCA Middle East Ready Bench
Representing Bishop Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Elaine J. W. Stanovsky
Bishop, Denver Area
United Methodist Church
Representing the Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church

Bishop Barry Beisner
Bishop of Northern California
Representing The Most Rev. Dr. Katherine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church

Jewish Leaders

Rabbi Paul Menitoff
Executive Vice President Emeritus
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Dr. Carl Sheingold
Executive Vice President
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Rabbi Amy Small
Past President
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly

Muslim Leaders

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed
National Director
Islamic Society of North America

Dr. Shaheer Yousaf
Islamic Society of North America
Islamic Center of Southern Maryland

Imam Yahya Hendi
Muslim Chaplain
Georgetown University

Dawud Assad
President Emeritus
Council of Mosques, USA

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