

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

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March 20, 2008

The Honorable Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Dr. Rice,

We write to commend your active support for current diplomatic efforts led by Egypt to turn what was for several days an informal, temporary and fragile cessation of hostilities between Palestinian forces in Gaza and the Israeli Defense Force into a formal, permanent and comprehensive ceasefire covering Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

Violence over the last several months, including continuous Palestinian rocket attacks from Gaza against civilian areas in southern Israel, Israeli military attacks and closures in Gaza and the West Bank, and the attack on Yeshiva students in Jerusalem, have killed and wounded many persons, added to the suffering and fears of both peoples, and seriously jeopardized chances for the Administration's initiative to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve a negotiated peace agreement by the end of this year.

We believe an effective, comprehensive ceasefire is an essential first step among several that both sides must take to renew people's hopes that peace is possible. Achieving this will help restore positive momentum in peace negotiations between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas. The split in governance between Gaza and the West Bank is incompatible with a durable peace agreement. A comprehensive ceasefire would also provide a context in which the United States could support efforts, possibly led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to help form a new unified Palestinian government capable of representing the West Bank and Gaza, and committed to rejecting violence and negotiating a two-state solution with Israel.

We pledge our support for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. As may be appropriate and timely, we would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and the President to express visibly our support for a two-state solution to the conflict.

Respectfully,

(List of Religious Leaders endorsing the letter follows.)

Religious Leaders Endorsing March 20, 2008 Letter to Secretary of State Rice

Christian Religious Leaders:

His Eminence, Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus, Archdiocese of Washington*
His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago
and President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*
Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, Diocesan Legate and Exec. Dir., Ecumenical Office, Armenian Orthodox
Church and President, National Council of Churches of Christ USA*
Bishop Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop, Episcopal Church*
Bishop Ann B. Sherer, United Methodist Church*
The Reverend Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)*
John H. Thomas, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ*
The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister & President, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)*
The Rev. Michael E. Livingston, Executive Director, International Council of Community Churches*
The Rev. Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries*
David Neff, Editor and Vice-President, Christianity Today*

Jewish Religious Leaders:

Rabbi Peter Knobel, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis*
Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus, Central Conference of American Rabbis*
Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism*
Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rector, American Jewish University (formerly University of Judaism)*
Dr. Carl Sheingold, Executive Vice President, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation*
Rabbi Toba Spitzer, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association*
Rabbi Brant Rosen, Immediate Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association*
Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association*
Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Vice President, A Different Future*

Muslim Religious Leaders:

Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America*
Imam Mohammed ibn Hagmagid, Vice President, Islamic Society of North America*
Naim Baig, Secretary General, Islamic Circle of North America*
Dawud Assad, President, Council of Mosques, USA*
Eide Alawan, Director, Office of Interfaith Outreach, Islamic Center of America*
Imam Yahya Hendi, Chaplain, Georgetown University*
Iftekhhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America*

*Organizations for Identification Only