

**National Interreligious Leadership Initiative
for Peace in the Middle East
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January 21, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President,

Appreciating the several current conflicts and different challenges each presents for U.S. leadership in the global arena, as members of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI), we write to urge a renewed, determined U.S. effort, in coordination with the Quartet, to work with Israel and Palestinian Authority to achieve a negotiated two-state peace agreement before it is too late.

The extended ceasefire following the most recent Gaza war presents an opportunity for a new international initiative for peace. This war demonstrated once again that there is no military solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If there is no peace agreement, there is a risk of more unilateral actions and more violence that may lead at some point to another war, and, tragically, to more casualties on both sides. With the region currently in greater turmoil than in the recent past, renewed violence would contribute to more acute instability.

Political leaders on both sides are exploring or already engaging in unilateral diplomatic initiatives that they think could advance their cause. The problem is that the starting points for each side are almost certainly unacceptable to the other side. After nine months of direct negotiations, Israeli and Palestinian leaders were unable to reach agreement on a framework for peace. Given current developments on the ground, including dangerous new violent clashes in Jerusalem, simply urging the parties to return to negotiations is no longer sufficient.

We believe the outline for a two-state peace agreement is widely known and would likely be accepted by majorities of Israelis and Palestinians if presented by their leaders as the only viable alternative to more violence and war. UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, the Taba Agreement (2001), the Arab Peace Initiative (2002), People's Voice Initiative (2003), the Geneva Initiative (2003), and the (unofficial) Israeli Peace Initiative (2011), taken together, provide practical and reasonable ideas for resolving all the issues, including borders and security, settlements, refugees, and the future of Jerusalem.

While time is running out for a workable two-state solution, it remains the most realistic resolution of the conflict in which both peoples can live in peace, security, and mutual recognition. With people on both sides looking for a positive political horizon after last summer's war, we believe now is the time for the United States and the international community to work with the parties to launch a new, even more determined initiative for Israeli-Palestinian peace. We are united in urging you to authorize Secretary of State Kerry, coordinating with the

Quartet and drawing on internationally accepted principles and practical ideas from previous official and informal negotiations, to offer a balanced and fair framework to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority as the basis for negotiating a two-state peace agreement to end the conflict.

Active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in such a bold peace initiative will require strong, public support, especially from religious communities. We pledge to mobilize support from our members in synagogues, churches and mosques across the country, and we would appreciate an early opportunity to meet with Secretary Kerry to discuss specific ways that we as religious leaders can help.

CC: Secretary of State John Kerry

List of Endorsers follows

Letter to President Barack Obama
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List of Endorsers

Christian Leaders:

Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
Committee on International Justice and Peace
Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington
Archbishop Vicken Aykasian, Director, Ecumenical Affairs, Armenian Orthodox Church in America
Jim Winkler, President/General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ USA
Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., President, Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church
The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church
Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Reverend Geoffrey Black, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ
Reverend Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister, President, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)
Reverend Leighton Ford, President, Leighton Ford Ministries, Board Member, World Vision US
David Neff, Editorial Vice-President (Retired), Christianity Today
John M. Buchanan, Editor and Publisher, Christian Century

Jewish Leaders:

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President, Union of Reform Judaism
Rabbi Rick Block, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Ph.D. Rector and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, American Jewish University
Rabbi Burt Visotzky, Jewish Theological Seminary
Rabbi Jason Klein, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Rabbi Deborah Waxman, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Rabbi Amy Small, Past President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Rabbi Peter Knobel, Past President, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Paul Menitoff, Executive Vice President Emeritus, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Rabbi Alvin M. Sugarman, Rabbi Emeritus, The Temple, Atlanta Georgia

Muslim Leaders:

Imam Mohammed Magid, President, Islamic Society of North America
Dr. Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America
Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder of the ASMA Society and Chairman of the Cordoba Initiative
Dawud Assad, President Emeritus, Council of Mosques, USA
Imam Yahya Hendi, Founder and President, Clergy Beyond Borders
Eide Alawan, Interfaith Office for Outreach, Islamic Center of America
Iftekhhar A. Hai, Founding Director, United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance

*Organizations for Identification Only