

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East

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Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Is More Urgent Than Ever.

Concerned with new challenging developments in the Middle East, as leaders of major Jewish, Christian and Muslim national religious organizations inspired by core teachings of our traditions, we affirm with urgency that Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace is more vital than ever. We remain guided by our founding "Principles of Cooperation" in which we acknowledge how our bonds with those on different sides of the conflict sometimes lead to differing viewpoints, and we reemphasize our common agenda for peace. We derive encouragement from benchmark principles developed by Arabs and Israelis in earlier formal and informal negotiations that provide practical parameters for a peace agreement that could be acceptable to majorities of Israelis and Palestinians.

At this time of momentous changes, the drive for Israeli-Palestinian peace must be viewed in the context of:

- the hopes and challenges related to the Arab Spring, including concerns for the rights of minorities;
- the aftermath of the war in Iraq, including challenges to Iraqi democracy and stability;
- the future of Afghanistan as the U.S./NATO role winds down;
- tensions in U.S.-Pakistan relations;
- the deepening crisis in Syria; and
- the dangers of confrontation over Iran's nuclear development activities.

Appreciating that we are addressing these issues in other forums, we agreed that all of these developments make efforts for Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace more, not less, urgent. Anchored in the deep concerns of our religious traditions to respect the hopes and rights of all people to live in peace, we reaffirm our commitment to work together for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership for comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, including a negotiated two-state peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

We acknowledge that 2011 was a difficult and frustrating year. While majorities of Israelis and Palestinians continue to long for peace, political problems on both sides inhibit leaders from moving forward. The months ahead, leading up to U.S. national elections, present a special challenge. We urge candidates not to use any rhetoric that could make prospects for peace more problematic. As Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders, we strongly caution candidates to *do no harm* to chances for a two-state Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

More specifically, the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East calls on the Administration, the Congress and candidates for office to support the following steps:

- Address warnings to both sides to prevent violence, and undertake diplomatic efforts, in coordination with the Quartet, to help maintain a durable, effective ceasefire; all attacks on civilians must immediately end;
- Continue to support Palestinian state-building and economic development capacity, including immediately lifting the Congressional hold on humanitarian aid;
- Support Palestinian efforts to form a government capable of representing the West Bank and Gaza on the essential conditions that it agree to halt violence, respect all existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and negotiate a two-state peace agreement with Israel;
- Urge Israel to halt all settlement expansion, including in East Jerusalem; and
- Urge a resumption of negotiations for a two-state peace agreement, based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, and drawing on elements from the Arab Peace Initiative (2002), the unofficial Israeli Peace Initiative (2011), and the Geneva Accord (2003) which might lead to an agreement acceptable to both sides.

We believe that U.S. support for these steps is essential to preserving hope for negotiated Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace, and that achieving peace would have profoundly positive effects on other current conflicts and challenges in the Middle East. As national religious leaders, we pledge to urge members of our communities across the country to work actively in the coming months to preserve and further prepare the ground for Middle East peace, and to support positive efforts by political leaders in both parties to help move towards this goal.

February, 2012

List of Endorsers follows:

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