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## CMEP to the President on March Trip to Israel and West Bank (March 14, 2013)



Dear Mr. President,

As the leaders of an ecumenical Christian organization committed to a just and lasting peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we write on the eve of your visit to the Holy Land to offer our encouragement and prayers for the work you will undertake with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Specifically, we urge you to seek firm commitments from leaders on both sides to re-engage in a peace process rooted in a just resolution of the conflict, universal security and recognition for both Israelis and Palestinians, an end to all forms of violence, and the peaceful co-existence of the children of Abraham.

We are pleased to hear reports that you plan to visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem during your forthcoming trip to Israel and the West Bank. The small, but ancient, Christian community in the Holy Land is frequently overlooked by visitors even though it plays an important role in promoting tolerance and understanding. We wish to encourage you to meet with the Christian leaders in the Holy Land during your visit so that you may hear firsthand their perspectives on the situation.

Your visit will give an important boost to the Christian communities of the Holy Land, which include both Israeli and Palestinian Christians. Many have been living with the hardships of conflict and occupation.

For example, Bethlehem's access to Jerusalem, Ramallah, and the northern part of the West Bank is essential to a viable, contiguous Palestinian state, but is threatened by expanding settlement activity. Construction of the separation barrier east of the 1967 lines also limits access and threatens to divide communities such as those in the Cremisan valley near Bethlehem. We stand with the heads of the Churches of Jerusalem who have continually called for political leaders to make universal security and non-violence a paramount pursuit in the quest for peace.

We urge you to use this trip to impress on public opinion in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories that an end to this conflict is possible. Cycles of violence have not resolved underlying sources of conflict. Both peoples are suffering the consequences of the continued failure of their leaders to reach an agreement. Both will gain considerable benefits from success. Governments on both sides need to do more to foster mutual recognition and respect. Failure to resolve this conflict soon, including an agreement on a shared Jerusalem, will condemn another generation of Israelis and Palestinians to unrest, suffering or worse.

Mr. President, there is still time for an agreement. We are people of hope. Please do everything you can to motivate your hosts to seize the opportunity of your visit to initiate a real and lasting reconciliation.

Sincerely,

Warren Clark   Russell M. Testa  
Executive Director   Board Chair