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## CMEP to Secretary Clinton regarding her trip to the Middle East (March 2, 2009)

March 2, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Clinton  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

Thank you for traveling to Cairo, Israel and the West Bank at this critical time for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Your visit and that of Special Envoy Senator Mitchell, together with recent statements by you and President Barack Obama, are encouraging signs of a serious commitment by this Administration to achieve a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace.

We represent 22 national U.S. churches and church organizations -- Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. We believe that urgent U.S. action must be taken now to preserve hope for a negotiated two-state solution. Any alternative raises serious problems or constitutes an invitation to ongoing conflict that would threaten both Israeli and U.S. national interests.

As you know, there are immediate concerns related to the Gaza situation, including the need to solidify the cease-fire, reopen the border crossings and end weapons smuggling. However, we write to you today with special concern about the impact of ongoing Israeli settlement activity. The government of Israel recently cleared the way for expansion of the Efrat settlement south of Bethlehem. These and hundreds of other plans are part of a broader pattern of unchecked settlement expansion throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem that is detrimental to the creation of a viable Palestinian state -- a core U.S. objective, as you reiterated this past Friday, and a key element to Israel's long-term security.

We urge you to make clear during your current Mideast trip that the Obama Administration will not tolerate ongoing Israeli settlement activity. In recent trips of our own, we have witnessed the success of Palestinian Authority efforts to increase law and order and prevent violence against Israelis. However, these security initiatives are undermined, U.S. diplomatic credibility is called into question, and extremists on all sides are strengthened, so long as Israel does not freeze all settlement activity. The U.S. has a critical role to play in holding both Israel and the Palestinians accountable for their obligations and creating a climate where a return to negotiations is feasible. During this season of Lent, as Christians focus on the need for God's grace and renewal, our prayers are with you, with Special Envoy Senator Mitchell and with President Obama that you will work for peace with boldness and not grow weary in the quest for a better future for all the peoples of the Holy Land.

Sincerely,

James Fine  
Board Chair

Warren Clark  
Executive Director

