March 7, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President,

We believe the current upheaval in the Arab world both reveals God’s desire for the liberation of all people from oppression (Psalm 146.7) and presents an opportunity to support moral values in advancing human rights.

In this connection, we wish to express our regret that the United States vetoed the resolution in the United Nations Security Council February 18 reaffirming that Israeli settlements activities in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, are illegal.

While we appreciate statements affirming continuing U.S. strong opposition to the expansion of Israeli settlements, these must be followed by concrete measures to halt this activity. We believe bold and immediate new steps are needed now to prevent this veto from further damaging America’s credibility as a broker to help resolve this conflict that threatens the security of both peoples and denies self-determination to Palestinians.

Negotiations to end this conflict have foundered not just because of remaining differences over the specific issues, but also because of deep fear and mistrust. Both sides need to have confidence that any agreement for a just peace with security will be lasting and reliably executed in a reasonable timeframe.

We call upon you therefore to open up broad new channels of diplomatic effort to encourage both sides to take responsibility now for creating the conditions necessary for talks to succeed. This initiative must necessarily include support from the Middle East Quartet, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference for a set of proposals, building on the Arab Peace Initiative. The concerns of persons displaced over the years by the conflict should be addressed. Neighbors and powers in the
region should be engaged no matter what their current relations with Israel.

With rapid change underway in the Arab world we believe that the time to act is now -- before events make the task of reaching an agreement more difficult. The Quartet recently expressed support for concluding an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians by this September, and you also have expressed the hope there can be an agreement by then.

With that time frame in mind, we hope that you and the other Quartet leaders will travel to the region together soon, visiting Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring Syria, to propose specific steps to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israel and all its neighbors.

We believe an interim agreement at this time would be folly. We have seen that stagnation in this peace process can be explosive. We appeal to you to initiate these bold actions now to help bring about resolution of all final status issues and a definitive end to this conflict. Only then can peace, healing and reconciliation of neighbors for which we all pray be achieved, so that all involved may have life more abundantly.

Sincerely,

**Archbishop Khajag Barsamian**
Primate of the Armenian Church
Eastern Diocese

**Rev. Geoffrey Black**
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

**J Ron Byler**
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee

**Very Rev. Thomas. P. Cassidy, SCJ**
President
Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men’s Institutes

**Shan Cretin**
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

**Marie Dennis**
Director
Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns

**Rev. Jerry Dykstra**
Executive Director

**Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey**
President, General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church

**Rev. Michael Kinnamon, Ph.D.**
General Secretary
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

**Reverend John L. McCullough**
Executive Director and CEO
Church World Service

**Rev. Dr. Roy Medley**
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches, USA

**Reverend Peter Morales**
President
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

**Stanley J. Noffsinger**
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren
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**Donna Graham, OSF**  
President  
Franciscan Friars (OFM)  
English Speaking Conference JPIC

**The Rev. Mark S. Hanson**  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Mary Hughes, OP**  
President  
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**Rev. Gradye Parsons**  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church (USA)

**His Eminence Metropolitan Philip**  
Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North American  
Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

**Diane Randall**  
Executive Secretary  
Friends Committee on National Legislation

**The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori**  
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The Episcopal Church

**Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins**  
General Minister and President  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)