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Ecumenical to President Obama in Support of Strong U.S. Leadership for Peace (April 5, 2010)

April 5, 2010

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of major Christian faith communities in America we write to express our strong support for your Administration's bold efforts to restart negotiations aimed at a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land. We applaud your efforts to halt settlement construction in East Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Palestinian territories, and we join you in seeking a comprehensive agreement that ends the occupation, provides security and recognition for Israel, and establishes a viable, secure and independent Palestinian state.

We believe that with your strong leadership these negotiations can lead to an accord soon that ends the conflict and achieves both the Palestinian goal of an independent, secure and viable state and Israel's goal of a secure state with recognized borders.

New construction or settlement expansion in East Jerusalem and the West Bank undermines the mutual trust that is a necessary condition for successful negotiations. In this regard, the announcement of March 9 for new housing in East Jerusalem is unacceptable. The expansion of settlements endangers efforts to start the proximity talks that are to be the first step towards direct negotiations on all final status issues that include borders, refugees, security, and a shared Jerusalem.

We cannot permit the benefits of reconciliation and peace to be undermined by fear. Continued violence only strengthens rejectionists on both sides. We also condemn therefore all violence such as that which led to four Palestinian deaths recently in the West Bank and a rogue rocket attack that killed a worker in southern Israel. Authorities on both sides must take steps to avoid provocations and maintain order.

This is an important moment in the struggle to end the occupation and achieve a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land – a restoration of right relationships that will allow Israel and the Palestinians to live in peace with each other and their neighbors.

Continuing U.S. involvement –with necessary support from the U.S. Congress and U.S. public opinion—will be needed to help both sides resolve complex issues. We pledge to give you every possible support in this effort and to join with our Jewish and Muslim colleagues to help work for that goal.

Sincerely,

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
Armenian Orthodox Church

Dr. Ray Bakke
Chancellor, Bakke Graduate University
Chair, Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding

United Church of Christ

Bishop Wayne Burkette
Moravian Church in America, Southern
Province

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

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey
Minister for Partnership Relations
Alliance of Baptists

Marie Dennis
Director
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Rev. Gerard Dykstra
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Christian Reformed Church in North America

Sister Donna Graham, OSF
President
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Franciscan Friars (OFM)

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

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

Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard,
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

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

Clifton Kirkpatrick
President
World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Church World Service

Mary Ellen McNish
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Bishop Gregory Vaughn Palmer
President
The Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Rev. Grady Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rolando L. Santiago
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee US

Robert Seiple
Former Ambassador-at-large for
International Religious Freedom

Ronald J. Sider
President
Evangelicals for Social Action

Joe Volk
Executive Secretary
Friends Committee on National Legislation

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