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Ecumenical Letter to President Obama Following Egypt Speech (June 4, 2009)

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

June 4, 2009

Dear Mr. President,

As American Christian leaders with a shared commitment to a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace, we have come together at a time of great opportunity and urgency. After decades of tragic conflict, many Israelis and Palestinians despair of the possibility of peace, yet with your determined leadership we believe the promise of two viable, secure and independent states can be realized.

We commend your message to the people of the Middle East and your challenge to all of us to work for Holy Land peace as we seek to build a more positive future for the people of the region and the world. We are grateful that you have identified resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a top priority and made clear your Administration's commitment to sustained, hands-on diplomacy. As you embark on peace efforts, we ask you to provide a clear framework for an end to the conflict, help Israelis and Palestinians make the difficult decisions necessary to achieve lasting peace, and hold both parties to account when they fail to honor their commitments.

Mr. President, you have assumed office at one of the most critical moments in the long history of this conflict. While the international community and majorities of the Israeli and Palestinian people are all committed to a two state solution as the best option for achieving peace and security, the window of opportunity is rapidly closing. Continued settlement growth and expansion are rapidly diminishing any possibility for the creation of a viable Palestinian state. The targeting of Israeli civilians through ongoing rocket fire and the insistent rejection by some of Israel's right to exist reinforces the destructive status quo. These actions, along with the route of the separation barrier, movement restrictions, and continued home demolitions, serve to undermine Palestinians and Israelis alike who seek peace. As hope dims, the threat of violence grows and hardliners are strengthened.

We share a common commitment to all the people of the Holy Land—Jews, Christians and Muslims—and are particularly concerned with the plight of the Palestinian Christian community. In the birthplace of our faith, one of the world's oldest Christian communities is dwindling rapidly, and with them the possibility of a day when three thriving faith communities live in shared peace in Jerusalem. Mr. President, it is apparent that unless there is an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement Christians in the Holy Land may cease to exist as a viable community.

Now is indeed the time for immediate and bold American leadership. Fruitful diplomacy will require U.S. engagement with a Palestinian unity government committed to peace with the state of Israel. We commend your important statements pressing both Israel and the Palestinians to live up to their obligations, and we urge your Administration to continue to bolster Palestinian capacity to halt violence and continue to demonstrate firm dedication to a viable Palestinian state by exhibiting no tolerance for Israeli settlement activity. While working to end rocket attacks against the people of southern Israel, the U.S. should also seek immediate relief for the population of Gaza—living in rubble and without basic

We welcome your call for people on both sides to recognize the pain and aspirations of the other. Because of this conflict many have lost the ability to see the other as human beings worthy of dignity and respect. An entire generation of Israelis and Palestinians has grown up amidst violence and hatred. We pledge to join with you to work with and support those in both societies who seek peace, justice, and security, standing beside those who hope for a better future for themselves and for the generations that follow.

The current political stalemate and declining situation on the ground demonstrate that Israelis and Palestinians cannot reach a negotiated agreement without a strong, helping hand. We urge your Administration to present proposals that go beyond the mere principle of two states and lay out a just and equitable solution that provides dignity, security and sovereignty for both peoples. Moreover, we appreciate your strong support for a comprehensive peace and we look forward to diplomatic efforts to build upon the historic Arab Peace Initiative, with its offer of recognition and normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for an end to the occupation.

There is no greater work than the Psalmist's call to "seek peace and pursue it" and no more critical time than now to finally end the conflict in the Holy Land (Ps. 34:14). We stand ready to support your bold action and are rallying Christians nationwide around robust U.S. peacemaking efforts to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace. Our prayers and mutual commitment are with you in this difficult and most important task.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Jimmy R. Allen
Coordinator
New Baptist Covenant

The Most Rev. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian
Primate
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)

David Black
President
Eastern University

Bishop Wayne Burkette
Moravian Church in America, Southern Province

Tony Campolo
Speaker
Eastern University, St. Davids, PA

Sr. J. Lora Dambroski, OSF
President, Leadership Conference of Women Religious
His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America Primate
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Marie Dennis
Director
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Dr. Joy Fenner
Former President
Baptist General Convention of Texas

Leighton Ford Ministries

Israel L. Gaither
Commissioner
National Commander
The Salvation Army

Rev. Dr. David Emmanuel Goatley
Executive Secretary-Treasurer
Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention

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
President, Lutheran World Federation

Dennis Hollinger
President
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

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

Dr. Joel C. Hunter
Senior Pastor, Northland Church
Member, Executive Committee of the
National Association of Evangelicals

Bill Hybels
Senior Pastor
Willow Creek Community Church

Lynne Hybels
Advocate for Global Engagement
Willow Creek Community Church

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop
The Episcopal Church

Reverend A. Wayne Johnson
General Secretary
National Missionary Baptist Convention of America

Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim
Archbishop

Margaret Mary Kimmins, OSF
President
Franciscan Action Network

Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary
National Council of Churches

Rev. Michael E. Livingston
Executive Director
International Council of Community Churches
Immediate Past President, National Council of Churches

Reverend Willie Maynard
Treasurer, National Baptist Convention, Inc.
Pastor, St. Paul Baptist Church, LA

His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick
Catholic Archbishop Emeritus of Washington

Rev. John L. McCullough
Executive Director and CEO
Church World Service

Mary Ellen McNish
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches

Richard J. Mouw
President
Fuller Theological Seminary

David Neff
Editor in Chief
Christianity Today

Stanley J. Noffsinger
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren

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)

Very Rev. Thomas Picton, CSSR
President Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Reverend Tyrone Pitts

Most Rev. John H. Ricard, SSJ
Catholic Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Bob Roberts, Jr.
Pastor
NorthWood Church, Keller, TX

Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba)
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

Rolando Santiago
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Dr. Chris Seiple
President Institute for Global Engagement

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

Reverend William J. Shaw
President, National Baptist Convention, Inc
Pastor, White Rock Baptist Church, PA

Ron Sider
President
Evangelicals for Social Action

Reverend T. DeWitt Smith
President
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

Richard Stearns President
World Vision

Rev. John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Jim Wallis
President
Sojourners

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

Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski
Catholic Bishop of Orlando

The Right Rev. John F. White
Ecumenical and Urban Affairs Officer
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Bishop Gabino Zavala

President Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement