

~July 18, 2005~

Stephen J. Hadley

Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

The White House

Dear Mr. Hadley,

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) appreciates the high priority that you and other officials at the National Security Council have placed on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. We encourage your efforts and stand ready to support the realization of the President's vision of a viable state of Palestine living side-by-side a secure Israel. Toward that goal, we agree that the United States should provide financial assistance to both Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel's decision to withdraw from Gaza is an important step toward ending the occupation. We urge your cooperative work with the Quartet and Arab partners to maintain the momentum without delay. The request earlier this week by Israeli officials for post-disengagement aid (reportedly \$2.2 billion in addition to the current \$2.5 billion in foreign aid) is alarming in amount and especially in light of Israel's continued actions to seize West Bank land and unilaterally predetermine borders and the status of Jerusalem without a negotiated agreement.

The provision of additional financial aid to Israel brings an important opportunity, indeed responsibility, to help Israel's leaders make decisions and take actions consistent with the roadmap and the President's vision. The CMEP coalition of U.S. churches and church related-agencies hears from both its organizations and their church members of growing dismay and exasperation that, despite the stern words of President Bush, Israel continues to build an odious separation barrier on Palestinian land, expand settlements and take actions to separate East Jerusalem from the West Bank.

The future of Jerusalem is a high priority issue for Churches for Middle East Peace. The direct connection - physically and politically - between East Jerusalem's Palestinian Christian population, church institutions and church-owned property with the West Bank is extremely important for many reasons. We see this connection as necessary for the continued existence and wellbeing of the Palestinian Christian community and for preserving the historic linkage between Christian holy sites in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. We worry that severing East Jerusalem, with its strong Christian presence, from a Palestinian state would place at risk the Palestinian tradition of religious pluralism.

Our concerns have significance far broader than those related to Christian faith and tradition. Churches for Middle East Peace met with President Abbas in May and asked that Palestinian governance recognize and codify the importance of religious freedom and the equality of peoples of all religions within the Muslim-majority state of Palestine. In addition, the inclusion of East Jerusalem in a future Palestinian state is essential for its economic viability and for recognition of its legitimacy by the Palestinian public and by the Arab neighbors of Israel and Palestine. Moreover, Israel's sole sovereignty and barricading of Jerusalem would be a provocation whose danger extends to the United States. The sharing of Jerusalem by the two peoples and the three faiths would be a powerfully positive message and example of religious freedom and tolerance for every person and state in the region.

President Clinton's proposal in December 2000 that Israel and Palestine share sovereignty over Jerusalem set a precedent for negotiations and other model agreements (Taba Negotiations, Geneva Accords and The People's Voice Initiative) which affirm that Jerusalem would be the mutually recognized capital of both Israel and Palestine. Policy options for Jerusalem's future are rapidly closing as facts change on the ground. We ask that the sharing of Jerusalem be a high priority policy objective of the President and his Administration.

Churches for Middle East Peace believes that policy does change, that justice can prevail, that peace is possible. With your help - and our help - we think President Bush can fulfill his vision, which is the vision of all who call for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of Churches for Middle East Peace

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