
ECUMENICAL LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Churches for Middle East Peace
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June 6, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As faith leaders in the United States, we are encouraged by the pledge you made on May 3, 2017 at the White House toward supporting a peace for Palestinians and Israelis “that allows both peoples to [live, worship, and thrive](#) and prosper.” Earlier this year, you expressed your intention to “work toward a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians” during meetings with both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin [Netanyahu](#) and Palestinian President Mahmoud [Abbas](#).

Israel has struggled for both recognition and security since its founding. This June 2017 marks 50 years since the beginning of Israel’s military occupation of Palestinian lands, an occupation that harms both peoples. We hope you will work to end this occupation that has gone on far too long: 50 Years Too Long.

During this 50th year, we acknowledge that while peace is the only way forward, many do not believe peace is possible. Ongoing settlement expansion combined with violence and incitement by both Palestinians and Israelis have resulted in fear and mistrust. Despite violating international law and [Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention](#), settlements continue to grow at an alarming rate. The Israeli government's recent announcement on March 30, 2017 to build yet another settlement in the West Bank is seriously troubling. We call on the U.S government to oppose such efforts. Settlement expansion directly undermines both the potential for a flourishing Palestinian state and a secure Israel. With each new settlement, the threat of violence increases, Palestinians face the loss of their land needed for a future state, and the prospects for a negotiated resolution to the conflict become more tenuous.

As Christians, we look to the Bible for guidance. Chapter 25 of Leviticus calls on us to mark the 50th year as the Jubilee Year - a year to “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.” Jesus also references this passage when he announces the proclamation “to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4) We hope and pray that both Israelis and Palestinians will be liberated from the cycles of violence that have scarred both peoples.

ECUMENICAL LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Mr. President, we ask you to take the necessary steps to make this year a true jubilee year and work toward a just and durable solution that advances security, human rights, and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians. These steps should include upholding longstanding U.S. policy that recognizes Israeli settlements as illegal and an impediment to peace while ensuring accountability for policies about settlements that disregard legal restraints and international consensus. We call on your administration to promote a shared Jerusalem by Palestinians and Israelis, as well as full access to the Holy Sites of the three religious traditions - Jews, Muslims and Christians - who call them holy.

We pray and hope for a negotiated resolution to the conflict. In this 50th year of occupation, we ask your administration to do more than just seek an end to conflict. Through the confiscation and destruction of viable agricultural lands, deindustrialization, and restriction of movement, the occupation has placed a stranglehold on the Palestinian economy. Trade is an essential component of a stable economy and without it poverty, unemployment, food shortages, and medical crises will continue to destroy the livelihoods and safety of Palestinians which in turn contributes to instability and violence that harms Israelis.

Mr. President, we encourage you to support development and humanitarian assistance that will promote human dignity, especially in the West Bank and Gaza, including access and protection for aid agencies and others. This year, there are more than 2 million people in Gaza and the West Bank in dire need of humanitarian assistance -- nearly one out of every two Palestinians.

Mr. President, we Christian leaders continue to choose hope and call for a just peace for both peoples and an end to the occupation. We will support your efforts to build a peace between Israelis and Palestinians “that allows both peoples to live, worship, and thrive and prosper.” It is possible in this 50th year to move from occupation toward jubilee and realize the vision of two viable states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

Respectfully,

Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon
Executive Director
Churches for Middle East Peace

Bishop Oscar Cantú
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

ECUMENICAL LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey
Director of Partnership Relations
Alliance of Baptists

Rev. Dr. Thomas R. De Vries
General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President
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The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
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Gerry G. Lee
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Very Rev. Kevin Mullen, OFM
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Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Bishop Bruce R. Ough
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ECUMENICAL LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Very Rev. Joseph Rahal
Senior Representative
Antiochian Archdiocese, Washington, DC

Diane Randall
Executive Secretary
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