



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

October 13, 2009

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

Dear Mr. President,

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we write to express our deep appreciation for your timely and courageous leadership in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian impasse and applaud your recent meeting with President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

We strongly urge you to remain firm in your commitment to achieving a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The U.S. plays a key role in negotiating necessary compromises and in holding both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to their obligations.

We express profound concern at the stalemate that persists and at the fading hopes for a two-state solution due to the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It is our firm belief that a just resolution is within reach if the United States remains unwavering in its determination to help the parties finally reach agreement.

The ELCA has a long-standing relationship with our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) which includes congregations, schools, vocational training, medical care, and social services in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Jordan. Additionally, we have a vigorous affiliation with the Lutheran World Federation whose many projects include Augusta Victoria Hospital, located in East Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives.

These commitments lead us to write to you at this critical juncture to express our conviction that now is the time for bold U.S. leadership. We urge the U.S. to insist upon an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land as well as an end to Palestinian violence against Israelis. We raise before you our concern that the continued growth of settlements and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza are immediate impediments toward finding a just peace. The ELCA has long called for a halt to settlements, and we reiterate that call now with a deep sense of urgency. The suffering of people in Gaza who are unable to obtain adequate food, clean water, necessary medical attention, and building supplies due to the border closures must be alleviated now. The deteriorating conditions in Gaza make a resumption of violence more likely; however opening the borders in a carefully monitored way that respects Israel's security needs will contribute to the well being of Palestinians in Gaza and the safety of Israelis in Sderot.

We continue to offer you our support and prayers as we hold fast to the hope that this region of turmoil can be a land where all of God's children dwell in peace.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson  
Presiding Bishop

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