

# U.S. church leaders call for new Middle East peace efforts

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March 10, 2011

New York, March 10 (ENInews)--Nearly two dozen U.S. Christian leaders are calling on the Obama administration to renew diplomatic efforts to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"With rapid change underway in the Arab world we believe that the time to act is now -- before events make the task of reaching an agreement more difficult," said 20 leaders of Anglican, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox denominations in a 7 March letter to President Barack Obama.

The leaders called upon Obama to "open up broad new channels of diplomatic effort to encourage both sides to take responsibility now for creating the conditions necessary for talks to succeed." In the letter, the leaders, writing as members of the Washington-based coalition Churches for Middle East Peace, said they were disappointed with the 18 February veto by the U.S. of a U.N. Security Council resolution that called Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories illegal.

"While we appreciate statements affirming continuing U.S. strong opposition to the expansion of Israeli settlements, these must be followed by concrete measures to halt this activity," the letter said. "We believe bold and immediate new steps are needed now to prevent this veto from further damaging America's credibility as a broker to help resolve this conflict that threatens the security of both peoples and denies self-determination to Palestinians."

It added: "Negotiations to end this conflict have foundered not just because of remaining differences over the specific issues, but also because of deep fear and mistrust. Both sides need to have confidence that any agreement for a just peace with security will be lasting and reliably executed in a reasonable timeframe."

Churches for Middle East Peace had issued a call on 2 February that the Obama administration not oppose the U.N. Security Council resolution.

Among those signing the most recent letter were the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches, the largest U.S. ecumenical body; the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Rev. Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA); and the Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, the presiding bishop and primate of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church.