



# Churches for Middle East Peace

## CMEP Congratulates President-Elect Obama; Renews Call for Peace

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Churches for Middle East Peace congratulates President-elect Barack Obama on his historic election and looks forward to working with his foreign policy team to advance U.S. policies conducive to Israeli- Arab peace. His election has created a new opportunity to achieve a just and lasting two-state solution and finally end the tragic conflict in the Holy Land.

While many issues both domestic and international in nature will compete for President Obama's immediate attention, priorities in the Middle East will need to be quickly established and acted upon. During the campaign, we were heartened that Obama pledged to work for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, "starting from the minute I'm sworn into office." He has also called for U.S. support of the Israel-Syria proximity talks and has urged diplomacy in resolving the impasse with Iran. David Ignatius, a columnist for the *Washington Post* wrote November 6th that "Obama wants to make an early push on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, despite political turmoil in Israel."

Churches for Middle East Peace has prepared the [backgrounder](#) below with excerpts of key statements from Obama's tenure as Senator and as a Presidential candidate that detail his positions on U.S. relations with Israel and the Palestinians and the role of U.S. diplomacy in regard to the peace process, Israel-Syria relations and Iran.

CMEP is already beginning outreach to the new Obama Administration. Following up on our July 21st letter to the Presidential candidates and subsequent communication with the two campaigns, CMEP is planning a meeting with the Obama transition team to ensure that the issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace is made a top agenda item as was promised on the campaign trail.

In the weeks and months ahead CMEP also will be working to mobilize American Christian leaders and grassroots advocates to build support for the new President and in the 111th Congress for robust U.S. diplomacy to secure Middle East peace. In the meantime, we will continue to support the ongoing Annapolis process.

### **Obama and Middle East Peace Issues: A Backgrounder**

[View this Backgrounder in PDF Format.](#)

**U.S. Diplomacy and a Two-State Peace**

"Obama and Biden will make progress on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict a key diplomatic priority. They will make a sustained push - working with Israelis and Palestinians - to achieve the goal of two states, a Jewish state in Israel and a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security." - [Obama/Biden Campaign Website](#)

"My goal is to make sure that we work, starting from the minute I'm sworn into office, to try to find some breakthroughs," - Commenting on how he would approach working for peace between Israel and the Palestinians - [Press Conference](#), July 22, Amman, Jordan

"...It's time to deepen our engagement to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, so that we help our ally Israel achieve true and lasting security, while helping Palestinians achieve their legitimate aspirations for statehood..."- [Remarks in Washington, DC](#), July 15, 2008

"...[A] secure, lasting peace is in Israel's national interest. It is in America's national interest. And it is in the interest of the Palestinian people and the Arab world. As President, I will work to help Israel achieve the goal of two states, a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security. And I won't wait until the waning days of my presidency. I will take an active role, and make a personal commitment to do all I can to advance the cause of peace from the start of my Administration... The United States must be a strong and consistent partner in this process - not to force concessions, but to help committed partners avoid stalemate and the kind of vacuums that are filled by violence. That's what I commit to do as President of the United States." - [Speech to American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#) (AIPAC), June 4, 2008

"On a trip to the Middle East, I met Israelis and Palestinians who told me that peace remains a distant hope without the promise of American leadership." - [Remarks to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#), April 23, 2007

"Diplomacy in the Middle East cannot be done on the cheap. Diplomacy is measured by patience and by effort. We cannot continue to have trips consisting of little more than photo ops with little movement in between. Neither Israel nor the United States is served by this approach." - [Speech to AIPAC](#), March 2, 2007

### **Jerusalem**

"...[my policy] is the same policy that Bill Clinton has put forward, and that says that Jerusalem will be the capital of Israel, that we shouldn't divide it by barbed wire, but that, ultimately that is... a final status issue that has to be resolved between the Palestinians and the Israelis." - [Interview with Katie Couric](#), CBS News, Amman, Jordan, July 22, 2008

"Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided..."- [Speech to AIPAC](#), June 4, 2008

"[I]t's going to be up to the parties to negotiate a range of these issues. And Jerusalem will be part of those negotiations...As a practical matter, it [division] would be very difficult to execute. And I think that it is smart for us to -- to work through a system in which everybody has access to the extraordinary religious sites in Old Jerusalem but that Israel has a legitimate claim on that city." - [CNN Interview](#), June 5, 2008

### **U.S. Relations with Israel**

"Barack Obama and Joe Biden strongly support the U.S.-Israel relationship, believe that our

first and incontrovertible commitment in the Middle East must be to the security of Israel, America's strongest ally in the Middle East. They support this closeness, stating that that the United States would never distance itself from Israel...He and Joe Biden believe strongly in Israel's right to protect its citizens. Barack Obama and Joe Biden have consistently supported foreign assistance to Israel..." - [Israel Fact Sheet](#), Foreign Policy, Obama/Biden Campaign Website

"[W]e - as friends of Israel- must resolved to do all we can to help Israel and its neighbors to achieve [peace]. Because a secure lasting peace is in Israel's national interest...I pledge to make every effort to help Israel achieve that peace. I will strengthen Israel's security and strengthen Palestinian partners who support that vision and personally work for two states that can live side by side in peace and security with Israel's status as a Jewish state ensured so that Israelis and Palestinians can pursue their dreams. I also expect to work on behalf of peace with the full knowledge that Israel still has bitter enemies who are intent on its destruction...As president, I will implement a Memorandum of Understanding that provides \$30 billion in assistance to Israel over the next decade - investments to Israel's security that will not be tied to any other nation..." -- [Speech to AIPAC](#), June 4, 2008

"...I think there is a strain within the pro-Israel community that says unless you adopt a unwavering pro-Likud approach to Israel that you're anti-Israel and that can't be the measure of our friendship with Israel. If we cannot have a honest dialogue about how do we achieve these goals, then we're not going to make progress..." - [Speech to Jewish Community in Cleveland, OH](#), February, 2008

"...But in the end we also know that we should never seek to dictate what is best for the Israelis and their security interests. No Israel prime minister should ever feel dragged to or blocked from the negotiating table by the United States. That's not what friends do. We must be partners; we must be active partners..." - [Speech to AIPAC](#), March 2, 2007

### **U.S. Relations with the Palestinians**

"Barack Obama supports U.S. efforts to provide aid directly to the Palestinian people by bypassing any Hamas-led government that refuses to renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist. Obama believes that a better life for Palestinian families is good for both Israelis and Palestinians." - [Israel Fact Sheet](#), Obama/Biden Campaign Website

"The United States and the international community must stand by Palestinians who are committed to cracking down on terror and carrying the burden of peacemaking. I will strongly urge Arab governments to take steps to normalize relations with Israel, and to fulfill their responsibility to pressure extremists and provide real support for President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. Egypt must cut off the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. Israel can also advance the cause of peace by taking appropriate steps - consistent with its security - to ease the freedom of movement for Palestinians, improve economic conditions in the West Bank, and to refrain from building new settlements - as it agreed to with the Bush Administration at Annapolis." - [Speech to AIPAC](#), June 4, 2008

"...[T]he Israelis will have to figure out how do we work with a legitimate Palestinian government to create a Palestinian state that is sustainable. It's going to have to be contiguous, it's going to have to work, it's going to have to function in some way. That's in Israel's interest by the way. If you have a balkanized unsustainable state, it will break down and we will be back in the same boat..." - [Speech to Jewish Community in Cleveland, OH](#), February, 2008

"...The biggest impediment that we've got right now is that in the Palestinian territories you have on the one hand some moderates...who would like to move forward on peace process but they don't have the capacity...On the other hand you've got Hamas, which is a better organization -- is better organized, and in some ways closer to the ground, but won't acknowledge Israel's right to exist, won't renounce violence and abide by previous agreements. So what you need is a partner on the Palestinian side that is willing to, both willing to enter into peace talks and is able to execute. Now, once we have that partner, Israel's going to have...some stones to carry in the road to peace. In particular, they are going to have to look at some of the settlements in the West Bank, which it's going to be very painful for them politically to do. But they're not going to take that extraordinarily difficult political step until they feel that they've got a partner on the other side. Now, in the interim, nobody's suffering more than the Palestinian people from this whole process. And I would like to see -- if we could get some movement from Palestinian leadership -- what I'd like to see is a loosening up of some of the restrictions on providing aid directly to the Palestinian people. I was in the West Bank and Ramallah, and it's very challenging. And I think you can get a sympathetic perspective both within Israel and from the U.S. and the Europeans if you have Hamas acknowledge that the road to peace is not going to go through -- it's not going to go through terrorism and other violence." - From [remarks at a campaign stop in Muscatine, Iowa](#) on March 11, 2007, as published by The Des Moines Register in a May 3, 2007, article

### **Hamas and Gaza**

"[Meeting with adversaries] does not include Hamas. They are not heads of state and they don't recognize Israel. You can't negotiate with somebody who doesn't recognize the right of the country to exist. So I understand why Israel doesn't meet with Hamas... I think that it is entirely legitimate to make distinctions between those who are heads of state, heads of established countries and those who have advocated terrorism... I think that is a perfectly appropriate distinction to draw." - [Interview with ABC News](#), April 10, 2008

"...All of us are concerned about the impact of closed border crossings on Palestinian families. However, we have to understand why Israel is forced to do this. Gaza is governed by Hamas, which is a terrorist organization sworn to Israel's destruction, and Israeli civilians are being bombarded by rockets on an almost daily basis. This is unacceptable and Israel has the right to respond while seeking to minimize any impact on civilians. The Security Council should clearly and unequivocally condemn the rocket attacks against Israel, and should make clear that Israel has the right to defend itself against such actions. If it cannot bring itself to make these common sense points, I urge you to ensure that it does not speak at all." - Letter to U.S. Ambassador to the U.N Zalmay Khalilzad, January 22, 2008

### **Israel-Syria**

"...the recent announcement that Israel and Syria have resumed their own peace negotiations is encouraging news, and it should spur the United States to support the parties' efforts to achieve their goal of a negotiated settlement, Turkey deserves praise for its role in arranging these talks, and the success of these negotiations could, among other things, be a setback for Iran's influence and Hizbollah's ability to acquire advanced weaponry..." - Letter to President George W. Bush, June, 2008

### **Iran**

"...Iran has sought nuclear weapons, supports militias inside Iraq and terror across the region, and its leaders threaten Israel and deny the Holocaust. But Obama and Biden believe that we have not exhausted our non-military options in confronting this threat; in many ways, we have

yet to try them...Obama supports tough, direct presidential diplomacy with Iran without preconditions. Now is the time to pressure Iran directly to change their troubling behavior. Obama and Biden would offer the Iranian regime a choice. If Iran abandons its nuclear program and support for terrorism, we will offer incentives like membership in the World Trade Organization, economic investments, and a move toward normal diplomatic relations. If Iran continues its troubling behavior, we will step up our economic pressure and political isolation. Seeking this kind of comprehensive settlement with Iran is our best way to make progress." - [Iran](#), The Obama/Biden Plan, Obama/Biden Campaign Website

"We cannot allow Iran to get a nuclear weapon. It would be a game-changer in the region. Not only would it threaten Israel, our strongest ally in the region and one of our strongest allies in the world, but it would also create a possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists... It is important, though, for us to use all the tools at our disposal...if we can work more effectively with other countries diplomatically to tighten sanctions on Iran...that starts changing their cost-benefit analysis. That starts putting the squeeze on them. Now, it is true, though, that I believe that we should have direct talks -- not just with our friends, but also with our enemies -- to deliver a tough, direct message to Iran that, if you don't change your behavior, then there will be dire consequences. If you do change your behavior, then it is possible for you to re-join the community of nations...We've got to try to have talks, understanding that we're not taking military options off the table." - Response to Question from Tom Brokaw during [Second Presidential Debate](#), October 7, 2008

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