

September 27, 2018

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

Dear Mr. President:

Peace and economic opportunity frequently go hand-in-hand. That is why, as church based denominations and organizations in the United States seeking a just and durable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we are greatly dismayed by the administration's decision to cut foreign aid benefiting Palestinians. We are asking that these decisions be reversed so that the conditions for seeking peace will be enhanced.

In recent weeks, the U.S. announced it would reprogram over \$200 million in FY2017 USAID funding supporting NGO humanitarian projects, withhold \$10 million in funds used for programs bringing together Israelis and Palestinians, and not proceed with over \$300 million funding for UNRWA planned for this calendar year. Together, these funding cuts will prove devastating for the Palestinian people and to the prospects of peace.

The purpose of U.S. economic assistance to the Palestinians is not to buy popular support or curry political favor. It is to address basic human needs which, if not met, would intensify suffering and may lead to increased violence. As faith leaders, we cannot ignore the human costs of these cuts. As Americans, we have a duty to ensure that our actions do not escalate the cycle of desperation and conflict or put political considerations ahead of humanitarian ones.

For Palestinians, the termination of more than \$500 million dollars in U.S. foreign aid and UNRWA funding will cause incalculable harm. In the case of UNRWA, it will jeopardize the education of over 515,000 children and threaten the millions who rely on UNRWA's 43 primary health centers, 15 community rehabilitation centers, and 19 women's program centers. Given UNRWA operates not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, we fear these cuts will have a destabilizing impact on the region as a whole. In addition, it will cause many dedicated professionals to lose their jobs. USAID funds numerous U.S. based NGOs which operate in the West Bank and Gaza, including Catholic Relief Services, International Medical Corps, Mercy Corps, and CARE. These NGOs provide supplemental food, healthcare, youth

programs, and vocational training for Palestinians. The effects will be particularly devastating in Gaza, where half the population relies on some form of international aid. No economy can function without educated children and healthy workers; no peace process can proceed where people's basic needs are not being met.

We took encouragement from your repeated statements supporting a peace "that allows both peoples to live, worship, and thrive and prosper." You were right to say that Palestinians and Israelis must work out a solution between themselves. In order to ensure this solution results in full equality and human rights for all in Israel-Palestine, such a durable solution must include appropriate leverage from the United States and other international actors. This solution must take into account the rights and needs of the most vulnerable, including the many Palestinians who will suffer as a result of these funding cuts. It must also take into account the over 50 year occupation of Palestinian land, which has severely stunted political and economic growth for Palestinians. However, by conditioning U.S. support for UNRWA on reforms to the way the agency counts Palestinian refugees, your administration is again attempting to take another final status issue "off the table." We believe unilateral action by the U.S. or any other country on this and other final status issues will not be helpful to securing a lasting and just peace in the Holy Land. In addition, we find the idea of withholding humanitarian funding as an enticement to return players to the negotiating table inconsistent with our faith values and an impediment to peace.

Mr. President, we ask that you restore U.S. funding for UNRWA to \$365 million, as it has been in previous years. We also ask that all funds appropriated by Congress for the Palestinian territories be directed to its intended recipients. U.S. policy already ensures that these funds are channeled through credible humanitarian organizations working in the Palestinian territories. Assisting these organizations to provide education and healthcare services is in the United States' best interests in the region and a necessary step toward helping to build peace between Israelis and Palestinians. As faith leaders we are called to stand together with the vulnerable and oppressed in Israel/Palestine and throughout the world. We appeal to you to at this critical moment to reverse your decision and reaffirm U.S. humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinians.

Respectfully,

Alliance of Baptists

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Christian Reformed Church of North America

Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

Churches for Middle East Peace

Church World Service

Evangelical Covenant Church, Serve Globally/MENA Region

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical, & Interfaith Relations

Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns

Reformed Church in America

National Council of Churches

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Episcopal Church

The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society