

September 12, 2019
President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Finding a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is an aspiration shared by church leaders in the United States, Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories, and around the globe. As leaders of diverse church communions and religious organizations, we ardently support robust U.S. leadership in coordination and direct engagement with all the relevant parties to bring about an end to this conflict in a way that addresses the human rights concerns of Israelis and Palestinians—Jews, Christians and Muslims. We hold fast to the understanding that all people are equal in God's eyes, deserving of human rights and dignity.

While we believe the US administration must play a key role in helping negotiate a resolution to the conflict, we harbor grave reservations not only about many of the specifics of the economic plan that was released in late June in Bahrain, but also about many of the fundamental assumptions that underlie it. Without a just political settlement, efforts to build up the Palestinian economy alone are an empty gesture that is neither sustainable nor viable in the long term.

While acknowledging the pressing needs facing the Palestinian economy laid out in your administration's "Peace to Prosperity: A New Vision for the Palestinian People", we maintain that these needs cannot be adequately addressed unless their root causes are properly diagnosed and addressed. Underdevelopment in the Palestinian territories is not the result of natural market forces; it is the direct product of over fifty years of Israeli military occupation and policies explicitly designed to stifle the Palestinian economy. Even the most thorough and well-planned economic development proposals will ultimately fail if the political conditions needed for peace are absent.

A truly viable peace can only be achieved by lifting the Gaza blockade, by ending the Israeli occupation of territories captured in 1967, through the realization of Palestinian self-determination, the recognition of Jerusalem as a shared capital for Israelis and Palestinians and the recognition and fulfillment of the rights of Palestinian refugees. Such a peace can only be reached in consultation with leaders representing both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

In July, as the Economic Conference in Bahrain was underway, a group of Christian leaders from the U.S. and Palestine met in Washington, DC to discuss how to steps we can undertake to help bring about peace in Israel/Palestine. The statement from the gathering is enclosed with this letter. We hope it may be of value as your administration continues its work.

We understand your administration may soon release its peace plan for Israel/Palestine. It is our hope that in future efforts to reach a political settlement between the parties, your administration will fully engage with representatives from the Palestinian Authority as you have engaged with representatives from the government of Israel. We ask that your administration abstains from taking any further unilateral actions that could compromise the ability of future negotiators to reach a solution and encourage the Israeli government to cease all settlement construction, demolition of Palestinian homes, and to refrain from annexations. We again reiterate that the necessary conditions for achieving a political solution are not a mystery. Just as the secure existence of Israel is of fundamental importance for Israelis, so too is the right to self-determination the most basic principle upon which Palestinians rightfully insist any future peace deal must rest.

Respectfully,

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General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Eddy Alemán
General Secretary
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His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
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