

## **Christians For Fair Witness on the Middle East Prays That Israeli/Palestinian Peace Talks Continue**

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(New York, NY April 7, 2014) Israeli/Palestinian peace talks appeared to reach a crisis last week after both sides took unilateral steps which ran counter to their commitment to the negotiations. Israel refused to release Palestinian prisoners unless the Palestinians agreed to continue talks beyond the initial April deadline. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas signed 15 United Nations treaties, reneging on his commitment not to seek relief through international bodies during the course of negotiations. Each side blamed the other for sabotaging the talks.

Christians for Fair Witness on the Middle East ("Fair Witness") was deeply concerned as there were signs that Secretary of State John Kerry's patience with both the Israelis and Palestinians was running thin when he announced last Friday that the U.S. was evaluating whether to continue its role in the peace talks. We do, however, remain hopeful because both sides are now showing some signs of being willing to continue negotiations.

According to Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton, Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion at Bard College and Fair Witness Executive Committee member: "Both sides have engaged in behavior which calls their commitment to the current round of peace talks into question. It is not obvious why both PM Netanyahu and President Abbas would prefer the status quo to a lasting and just peace."

Rev. Msgr. Dennis Mikulanis, Vicar for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego and Fair Witness Executive Committee member, said "this is a critical time and all of us who wish the Israelis and Palestinians well must pray very hard that level heads and open hearts prevail. There is only one way to end the occupation and bring peace to this region and that is through negotiations. There will never be either peace or justice unless Israeli and Palestinian leaders both summon up the historic courage to come to the table and agree on a final status peace treaty."

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