

Christians For Fair Witness On The Middle East Urges Israelis And Palestinians To Respond To The Kerry Initiative By Returning To Negotiations

June 4, 2013

There is hope for an end to the occupation and a two-state solution with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's initiative to restart peace talks in Israel and Palestine. So far Mr. Kerry's efforts have included an economic plan to mobilize \$4 billion of investment in the West Bank and proposals for joint Israeli-Palestinian economic activities. Palestinian officials have said that Kerry has given them until June 7 to let the U.S. know whether they are serious about the possibility of reviving peace talks.

"We are very pleased to see movement in this area," said Rev. Scott Ickert, Senior Pastor of Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church in Arlington VA and Fair Witness Executive Committee member. However, Rev. Ickert adds: "Economic initiatives are helpful but alone they are not the answer. A political solution is necessary to end the occupation and to bring peace. The parties have to sit down and negotiate a final-status deal with terms for borders, Jerusalem, refugees, security and settlements. There is no other way to settle all issues and end all claims under international law."

Unfortunately so far the response from both Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has not been overly encouraging. In response to the Kerry initiative, Abbas has variously stated that he will not return to negotiations until there is a complete Israeli settlement freeze, Israel agrees to accept negotiations based on a state within 1967 borders and Israel releases all Palestinian prisoners. On the Israeli side of the equation, although Netanyahu quietly ordered a settlement freeze, previously approved plans for construction of Jewish housing in East Jerusalem settlements are proceeding.

Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton, Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion at Bard College, also a member of the Executive Committee of Fair Witness, added that "we are praying that both Abbas and Netanyahu will have the courage and wisdom to end their bickering over terms of reference and pre-conditions and sit down at the table and finally agree to the details for a two-state solution and an end to all claims. That is the only way that peace and justice will ever come to this land."