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Religious leaders call for US initiative for Palestinian-Israeli peace

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Three Catholic prelates joined more than two dozen other Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders in urging the United States to embark on a new initiative to secure peace between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel.

The leaders called upon U.S. diplomats to seek a two-state agreement "before it is too late" in a statement [1] from the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington, Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, and Auxiliary Bishop Denis Madden of Baltimore were the Catholics who included their names on the Jan. 25 statement.

Expressing concern that the violence that erupted in southern Israel and Gaza in November will continue periodically in the future, the leaders said the movement toward "a viable two-state solution continues to stagnate."

"The status quo is unsustainable and dangerous to both Israelis and Palestinians. Now is not the time for another cycle of recriminations. It is time to break the cycle of violence with bold initiatives for peace," the statement said.

"The current dangerous stalemate, including the legacy of past failed peacemaking efforts, undermines our security and that of others, destabilizes the region, fuels terrorism and extremism, allows continuing Israeli settlement expansion and prolongs Palestinian disunity," the leaders said. "These realities and the absence of negotiations threaten to kill the prospect of a viable two-state peace agreement, the only realistic solution to the conflict."

The leaders called for international cooperation to achieve peace and cited the effort by the U.S. and Egypt to negotiate an end to the recent hostilities.

Acknowledging that daunting challenges remain, the leaders called upon President Barack Obama to act early in his new term to secure peace among Israelis and Palestinians. "Once again, we need active, fair and firm U.S. leadership to help break the current deadlock and to achieve a two-state peace agreement now before it is too late," the statement said.

Other leaders signing the statement include Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, and Sayyid Syeed, national director of the Islamic Society of North America.

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[1] http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org/downloads/2013_01StatementwEndorsers.pdf