



Office of the Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

June 3, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to express my deep sadness over events surrounding the flotilla seeking to deliver humanitarian goods to Gaza and to ask your administration to do all in its power to assure that such a tragic incident is not repeated.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has a long history of engagement in Israel and the Palestinian territories through our sister church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. In addition, we are an active member of The Lutheran World Federation which operates the Augusta Victoria Hospital, located in East Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. Alongside our Christian partners in the region, we work in concert with the interfaith community to seek a just peace for all.

From my service on the White House Task Force for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, I know that your administration is committed to welcoming voices of faith in your deliberations.

Therefore, I write to urge you to use this time of tragedy to redouble the U.S. effort to provide leadership to achieve lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace. It is my hope that this incident will not interrupt the proximity talks now being conducted through your administration but instead will intensify on all sides the commitment to serious negotiations.

Furthermore, the attempt to deliver humanitarian materials to Gaza via the flotilla highlights the ongoing blockade of Gaza with all its consequences for the 1.5 million people living there.

Israel's blockade must be fully lifted, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1860. While some humanitarian aid has been allowed to reach the people of Gaza, the economy, particularly the agricultural and fishing sectors, has been devastated. The World Health Organization has documented the serious deterioration in Gaza's health system due to restrictions on movement and access.

The closed borders also mean increased unmonitored tunnel traffic which allows not only food and supplies, but also weapons, to flow into Gaza. The welfare of the people of Gaza and the safety of Israelis will be served by opening the monitored border crossings in a secure manner for aid, trade, and commerce.

Finally, as this incident raises many questions which must be answered, I support a full, international, and independent investigation into this matter.

I am grateful for the leadership your administration has demonstrated in seeking Middle East peace. You have my prayers and those of so many others in this pursuit.

In God's grace,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
President, The Lutheran World Federation