



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

October 22, 2014

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

Dear Mr. President,

As the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a church which calls for a cessation of all settlement activities and withdrawal from settlements on Palestinian territory to the 1967 boundaries, I commend your Administration for urging the Israeli Government to reverse its recent declaration as "state land" the estimated 988 acres in the Gush Etzion Jewish settlement bloc in the occupied West Bank. We hope your Administration will continue to pursue this reversal.

Similarly, we share your Administration's concern regarding the Israeli Government's reportedly recent move to advance the settlement planning process in the sensitive area of Givat Hamatos in East Jerusalem. This plan for a new neighborhood, comprising 2,610 housing units, would cut the territorial continuity between the Palestinian neighborhoods in South Jerusalem and the future Palestinian state.

We also share your Administration's assessment that the recent occupation of six residential buildings, consisting of approximately 20 housing units in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem, is a provocative act that only serves to escalate tensions at a moment when those tensions already have been high. This new occupation, the largest since 1991, could expand the settler presence by about 35% from the number of settlers currently in the area.

It is deeply distressing to us that these kinds of actions, which seek to create new "facts on the ground," continue unabated. Along with Jewish organizations like Peace Now and B'Tselem, we fully agree with your Administration that such actions are counter-productive to achieving a comprehensive and sustainable peace based upon a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, where international human rights and humanitarian law are respected and upheld. Moreover, such actions reinforce despondency among the Palestinian people, limiting optimism that a political solution will be found.

Therefore, we urge you to call upon all parties to the conflict to refrain from violent or provocative actions that could lead to more casualties and further exacerbate the existing barriers toward a return to negotiations and a just final status agreement that results in two viable, secure states living side-by-side in peace.

Yet, as a church grounded in hope (1 Peter 3:15), we pray that the current truce, following the recent war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, will hold so that hope might begin to be restored. It is imperative that, with the help of the international community, both Palestinian and Israeli leaders return to negotiations to identify and constructively address the underlying causes of continued tension, so that God's peace and justice will prevail.

We re-commit ourselves to this vision, and continue to pray for you and all people of good will for their efforts to this end.

Your Sister in Christ,

Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop

Cc: The Honorable John F. Kerry, Secretary of State; The Honorable Anne Patterson, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs; The Honorable Michael Ratney, Consul General and Chief of Mission, Jerusalem; Mr. Denis McDonough, Chief of Staff, Executive Office of the President; Mr. Philip Gordon, Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf Region, National Security Council