July 31, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As the national bodies of U.S. churches and Christian organizations, we join others worldwide who are calling for an immediate end to the violence—as well as its underlying causes—in Palestine and Israel. As the situation continues to deteriorate, and horrendous death and destruction mount in Gaza, we are called by conscience to say, “Enough.”

Sadly, the scenes that we are witnessing are all too familiar. Over the last decade, Israel has repeatedly carried out similar military operations in Gaza. In each instance, over a period of days or weeks, Israel bombed and invaded Gaza and Palestinian militant groups stepped up their practice of firing rockets into Israel. Each of these operations ended with a cease-fire that temporarily decreased military action but did not end the conflict nor lift the oppressive Israeli blockade institutionalized in Gaza since 2007.

It is our view that these cease-fires failed to last because they did not address deeper injustices. After each new cease-fire Palestinians in Gaza remained subject to the legal, structural, and physical violence inherent in Israel’s occupation and siege on Gaza, which constitutes collective punishment. This includes crushing restrictions and limitations placed on Palestinian movement, access to water and electricity, economic development, and other freedoms in both the West Bank and Gaza.

The Obama administration and Congress have rightly condemned the indiscriminate rockets from Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups into Israel. It is time for the U.S. to condemn the Israeli bombardment of civilian centers and the blockade just as strongly. This latest escalation cannot be divorced from the broader context of the Gaza siege and occupation.

To achieve a lasting peace, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, including the siege of Gaza, must end. The U.S. must, therefore, make ending the occupation and lifting the Gaza siege priorities for our foreign policy in the region.

Violence and military force will never bring peace for Israelis and Palestinians. Military aid to Israel amounting to more than $3 billion per year creates a heavy moral obligation for the U.S. to ensure that this aid is not used in violation of U.S. law and fundamental human rights. A key step in this direction would be for the United States to investigate the use of U.S.-supplied weapons and military equipment during this conflict and to ensure full accountability under existing U.S. law if human rights abuses have been committed using this equipment.

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis will only be resolved when Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories is ended, and the inherent equality, worth, and dignity of all Palestinians and Israelis is realized.

We urge you to take action to both stop the current violence and use U.S. influence and diplomatic weight to push for a just peace that will benefit all of the people of the region.

We are grateful for the attention you have given to the search for lasting peace in the Middle East, and we offer you our prayers.
Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
Church of the Brethren
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church
Pax Christi International
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas’ Extended Justice Team
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

cc: Members of the U.S. House
    Members of the U.S. Senate