

## **Consensus Statement on Israel's Disengagement Plan and the Future of the Peace Process**

June 21, 2005

*Approved by the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties*

### **Introduction**

The Arab–Israeli conflict is often framed as a dispute over land between Israel and the Palestinians. This is only partially true. The conflict is multi-dimensional. Israel has had to defend its very existence for more than half a century in the face of active and sustained hostility that includes terrorism, boycotts, an international campaign to de-legitimize Israel's right to exist, and multiple wars waged by more than a dozen Arab and Muslim states. Most of these states have yet to follow the example of Jordan and Egypt in making peace with Israel.

True peace will only come when Israel's enemies renounce violence and accept Israel's right to exist in secure and recognized borders. When Israel is secure it can—as it has on numerous occasions—make bold moves for peace.

### **Background**

The JCRC has issued numerous consensus statements on the Middle East conflict over the years. Our most recent statement was issued on February 11, 2003. Since our last statement, there have been a number of major developments in the region:

- the Government of Israel's Disengagement Plan that will withdraw the Israel Defense Forces and evacuate settlements from all of Gaza and the northern West Bank, and the widespread support, as shown in repeated polls, by most Israelis for the disengagement plan;
- the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, the subsequent emergence of new Palestinian leadership and presidential elections in the Palestinian Authority;
- the formation in Israel of a Government of National Unity with the Likud and Labor parties as the two main components;

- possible resumption of negotiations based on the “Roadmap;”
- Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s repeated support for a “two-state vision (that) involves great concessions on both sides;”<sup>[1]</sup>
- the mutual declaration by Prime Minister Sharon and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas of a “ceasefire” between Israel and the Palestinians agreed upon at the February 8, 2005 summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt;
- The modest improvement of relations between Egypt, Jordan and Israel, and the role played by Egypt in facilitating the Gaza disengagement;
- Iran’s nuclear weapons development program and Iran’s avowed and often repeated public statements to destroy Israel, creates a new military dynamic that poses a serious threat to Israel’s existence, and to the security of Europe and the United States. Combined with its support of radical rejectionist forces in Palestinian society, Iran’s potential to destabilize the region is of urgent concern.
- the threat of a very small number of Israelis determined to thwart the disengagement plan through the use of violence;
- the call by some rabbis for religious soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate settlers from the settlements;

In light of this new, but tenuous, situation on the ground, through a deliberative process involving a wide range of diverse perspectives, we have agreed on points of consensus to reflect this rapidly changing reality in the region.

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## Consensus Points

### Key Points of Consensus in Light of These Developments on Steps Toward Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

- **We support the Government of Israel’s Disengagement Plan.**

This plan, unveiled by Prime Minister Sharon in December 2003, is designed to ensure that the State of Israel will remain a “Jewish and democratic state with a solid Jewish majority.”<sup>[1]</sup>

- **We support the Israeli government’s endorsement of a two-state solution to end the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.**

The determination of the final borders and other final status issues must be left to the parties themselves to negotiate in a peace process free from violence and the threat of violence.

- **The Disengagement Plan can only be successful if there is a commitment on the part of the Palestinian leadership to put a total end to terrorism.**

The new Palestinian leadership must make a one hundred percent effort to end terrorism. We call upon the PA to disarm the terrorist groups and infrastructure. This includes: removal of existing stockpiles of weapons and preventing such stockpiles from being rebuilt; preventing the smuggling of weapons across international borders; and closing of clandestine weapons manufacturing. The future of peace, and the stability of the PA itself, is fully dependent on the PA taking this action.

- **Comprehensive democratic reform of the Palestinian Authority is a necessary step toward a lasting peace.**

We encourage members of Palestinian society to add their voices to those courageous individuals calling for comprehensive reforms in the Palestinian Authority and an end to “armed attacks” against Israelis. A serious peace process requires a serious commitment on the part of the PA to end incitement to violence, hatred and anti-Semitism in its media, mosques and schools. We urge the Palestinian Authority to promote peaceful coexistence between Israelis in schools, media and in government statements to the Palestinian public. We further urge the Palestinian Authority to invest in its infrastructure in a financially transparent process so as to build among Palestinians a sense of hope in the future.

- **Israel possesses the inalienable right of any sovereign nation to defend its citizens from violent attack.**

We reiterate our support of Israel’s efforts to suppress terrorism by any reasonable means. We also support efforts by Israel to cooperate with Palestinian security forces to ensure a cessation of violence. We also recognize that Israel erected the security barrier in response to an intense wave of Palestinian terrorism that targeted Israeli civilians. This barrier has proven effective in significantly reducing terror attacks against Israelis. We further recognize that the route of the security barrier is controversial, and support the Israeli Supreme Court’s ruling that the barrier must be built so as to minimize

hardships to Palestinians. We also acknowledge that the security barrier does not constitute Israel's final border, and it is our profound hope that when the will exists on the Palestinian side to disarm the extremists and put an end to terrorist incursions into Israel the barrier will become unnecessary and be removed.

- **We urge a fair, reasonable, and practical resolution to both refugee populations—Palestinian, and Jews from Arab countries—that arose as a result of the Arab–Israeli conflict.**

We reject the demand that all Palestinian refugees and their descendants have a right to immigrate to the State of Israel, the so-called “right of return.” There is no such “right.” Such a demand is incompatible with a two-state solution and is code for the destruction of the State of Israel. Any resolution of the Palestinian refugee question must be practical, reasonable and equitable as determined by negotiations between the relevant parties.

The Palestinian refugee issue is intertwined with a parallel Jewish refugee issue, given that as a result of repressive policies enacted by Arab governments fully 99% of the Arab world's Jewish inhabitants were either expelled or were compelled to flee from their homes in ten Arab countries, and most of these refugees settled in Israel. Their properties were confiscated without compensation by these Arab governments.

We therefore call upon the United States, countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the international community and all fair-minded people to recognize that two refugee populations were created as a result of the years of turmoil in the Middle East. We strongly support redress for the Jews displaced from Arab countries.

- **We support the continued constructive role the United States has historically played in the Middle East process.**

We urge the United States to play an active role to ensure the success of the disengagement plan, so as to lay the foundation for future progress. The US should take steps to bolster the standing of democratic reformists in Palestinian society including economic incentives to help jumpstart the Palestinian economy, provided these economic incentives are tied to progress in the full disarmament of the terrorist organizations operating within the PA's jurisdiction and strict accountability and transparency.

- **We urge Egypt and Jordan to continue their increasingly constructive role in the Disengagement process.**

Egypt and Jordan both have a vital role to play in the months ahead to ensure that the withdrawal by Israel from Gaza and parts of the West Bank will not result in a power vacuum and chaos. We call upon Egypt to continue its increasing cooperation with Israel, to more closely coordinate security matters with Israel, and to contribute to stability in Gaza after Israel's withdrawal. We especially call upon Egypt to take determined action to prevent weapons smuggling from Sinai into Gaza. We call upon all Arab and other Muslim states, including Saudi Arabia, Syria Lebanon and Iran, to support actively the peace process, to end incitement, and to end support for terrorist groups. A lasting and stable peace in the Middle East also depends on the acceptance and recognition of Israel by the region's Arab and other Muslim states, the renunciation of existing states of war, and the building of normal relationships between these states and Israel.

- **We condemn Iran's nuclear weapons development program and call upon the international community and the United States to make this issue a high priority. We also call upon our government to end any and all illegal dealings between American corporations and Iran.**

We encourage all European countries to actively monitor and oppose Iran's nuclear weapon development program and to employ all reasonable means to prevent it from being operational.

An Iranian nuclear weapons capability would create an existential threat to Israel and pose serious security threats to Europe and the United States. It would further enhance Iran's influence with Islamist radicals in Palestinian society, potentially leading to enormous pressure on the Palestinian Authority to avoid making any kind of peace with Israel.

Already, Iran gives massive economic, political, ideological and military support for radical Islamist movements in the region, including Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Iran's stated foreign policy goal is the destruction of Israel, and in pursuit of this goal, Iran consistently tries to undermine the peace process by activating terror cells to disrupt negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Iran's successful development and deployment of nuclear weapons would greatly enhance its capabilities in its pursuit of these foreign policy objectives and would

thus be a major destabilizing factor in the region, potentially fueling a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, with several other neighboring countries starting their own nuclear weapons programs.

- **We condemn, and stand by the Israeli government's opposition to, the rhetoric by a fringe within-Israeli society that promotes violence as a response to policies undertaken by the democratically elected Israeli government.**

Extremist rhetoric creates an environment that incites individuals to engage in hateful, illegal, and violent acts. At the same time, the rights of free speech and lawful dissent which are basic and indispensable in a democratic society must be protected. It is critically important that those with various views of the peace process condemn explicit hate speech, venomous language, and threatening words. It is also critically important that opportunities for dialogue among all the conflicting viewpoints be created to promote an atmosphere in which differences can be expressed with civility and respect.

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## Footnote

1. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Address at the Herzliya Conference, December 16, 2004 (Prime Minister's Office, Communications Department).