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June 15, 2021

President Joseph Biden, The White House
Secretary of State Antony Blinken, U.S. Department of State

Dear Mr. President and the Honorable Antony Blinken,

We, the board members of Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace (PCAP), an interdenominational network of Palestinian American Christians committed to working for peace in the Holy Land, are writing to you at an urgent time for leadership regarding Palestine-Israel. As people of goodwill called by our faith to be peacemakers, we are continually seeking opportunities to transform this asymmetric conflict which has blighted the lives of so many. We are heart-broken and incensed to have witnessed the painful events in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and other parts of the land during the last few weeks. Although violence seems ever present in the land, we are enjoined by Christ's example of nonviolence and *agape*, and we are firm adherents of nonviolent resistance. We also take inspiration from Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time." Mr. President and Secretary Blinken, the Palestinian people are crying out for justice, and we hope that you will undertake creative and courageous steps to do what is right.

PCAP is heartened to see that more positive cooperation has been taking place between the United States and the Palestinians, especially in comparison to the previous administration, with the reopening of the American consulate in East Jerusalem, resumption of assistance to UNRWA, and the commitment to aid the devastated Gaza Strip. We recognize Secretary Blinken expressing, in his last trip to the Holy Land, that Palestinians aspire "to live in freedom; to have their basic rights respected, including the right to choose their own leaders; to live in security; to have equal access to opportunity for themselves, for their children; to be treated with dignity." While we share these aspirations, we believe that much more than these limited actions and words must transpire for democracy, justice, and peace, to prevail.

Specifically, and with regard to Secretary Blinken's comment supporting Palestinians' right to choose their own leaders, PCAP urges the U.S. to reconsider its policy towards Hamas. In 2006, the Palestinian Authority elections were held with the encouragement of President George W. Bush and under the observation of the Carter Center. In what was a surprise for many, however, Hamas received sufficient votes to form the next government. With the electoral victory of Hamas, the U.S., backed away from its endorsement of the democratic process and halted aid to the PA. This policy contributed to the disastrous current situation from which the region, and the people of Gaza in particular, are suffering. More recently, President Abbas postponed the 2021 Palestinian elections, and much of that decision had to do with the sensitivity surrounding the inclusion of Hamas in the elections.

We believe that assigning the label of "terrorist organization" to Hamas hides the more complicated truth that Hamas is a reflection and result of the untenable and unjust status quo in the land. Hamas is the current government in the Gaza Strip, providing most everyday functions and services for its more than two million residents. A sizable number of Palestinians support Hamas because it is seen as less corrupt and more effective in governing than Fatah, not necessarily due to its ideology. In addition, many Palestinians support Hamas because they have seen little to no benefit from Fatah rule and what they have concluded are phony peace processes. Hamas even has a number of Palestinian Christians among its representatives and constituents. It has also called for a decades-long truce (*hudna*) with Israel, which the latter has consistently rejected.

In the interest of advancing democracy, justice, and peace, PCAP calls on the United States to support fair and transparent elections for Palestinians, including Hamas and their candidates, and voters in East Jerusalem. We also urge the U.S. administration to communicate with Hamas in order to foster cooperation,

facilitate humanitarian aid, and de-escalate violence. The U.S. has shown the ability to communicate with and recognize groups that it once deemed as terrorist organizations, including the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the African National Congress.

PCAP believes it is time for the U.S. to show leadership and take visionary steps to once and for all transform this conflict. It is time to stop toeing Israel's line on Hamas, which serves to keep the Palestinian people divided, thwarts peace overtures, and provides cover for its continuing occupation, illegal land seizures, and systemic violations of Palestinian human rights.

In the last few weeks, Palestinians within the region and the diaspora -along with their Jewish and other allies- have risen in unison calling for their freedom and for an end to Israel's unjust occupation, policies, and actions. We call on our U.S. government to recognize this unity and engage with those whom Palestinians choose as their representatives.

By our faith, we are guided to value God's presence within all people and to hold all with love, even our enemies. We ask no less of you. We continue to pray for peace, justice, and equality for all the people of our Holy Land.

Respectfully,



Reverend Doctor Alex Awad (Co-Chair)

Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace