

Faith leaders to Rice: Boost peace process: Interfaith team and State Department begin talks

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A six-member interfaith team of Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders urged Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to increase U.S. involvement in the Israel-Palestine peace process at a meeting in Washington late last month.

The six represented the 35-member National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI), which formed in December of 2003.

Aside from restating hopes for a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, one representative—Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—said a significant result of the meeting was that NILI members were invited into regular conversations with the State Department.

“This will allow us to hold each other accountable for taking steps toward achieving lasting and just peace between Israelis and Palestinians,” Hanson said.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, former archbishop of Washington, D.C., said U.S. leaders must actively promote peace in the Middle East, adding that Israelis and Palestinians should build public support and be held accountable for successes and setbacks.

“People are suffering on both sides of the divide,” said Rabbi Paul Menitoff, former executive vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. “There have been too many lives lost over the years.”

The leaders committed themselves to building public support for peace in their religious communities.

“This was a substantive and hopeful meeting in which we recognized that sometimes it is out of great despair that we are able to come together and then

move forward,” said another participant, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church.

Others attending the meeting with Rice included Sayyid Muhammad Syeed, national director of the Islamic Society of North America; Rabbi Amy Small, ex-president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association; Nicholas Burns, the undersecretary of state for political affairs; and John Hanford IV, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.