

# Evangelical coalition favors creation of Palestinian state: Ron Sider leads coalition

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A coalition of evangelical leaders is attempting to “correct a serious misperception” that all evangelicals oppose establishing a Palestinian state.

Led by Ron Sider, a professor at American Baptist-affiliated Palmer Theological Seminary in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, and head of Evangelicals for Social Action, the coalition sent a letter to President Bush expressing support for a proposed two-state solution.

“The only way to bring the tragic cycle of violence to an end,” reads the July 27 letter, “is for Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate a just, lasting agreement that guarantees both sides viable, independent, secure states.”

Historically, evangelicals have adopted a pro-Israel stance in defense of the biblical “chosen people.” The letter reflects a more nuanced perspective on the conflict—one that affirms legitimate property rights on both sides while also placing blame for violence on both sides.

“We know that blessing and loving people (including Jews and the present state of Israel) does not mean withholding criticism when it is warranted,” the letter says, suggesting that “the best way we can bless Israel” might be to “remember . . . the profound teaching on justice that the Hebrew prophets proclaimed so forcefully.”

Thirty-four evangelical leaders signed the document, including a former president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the presidents of Fuller Theological Seminary and Bethel University, the editor of *Christianity Today* and the national director of Vineyard USA.

The letter was released not long after a recent Washington convention hosted by John Hagee, a San Antonio megachurch pastor who heads Christians United for

Israel, a staunchly pro-Israel group. He told the *New York Times*, "Bible-believing evangelicals will scoff at that message." -*Religion News Service*