



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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April 6, 2006

The Honorable Henry J. Hyde
Chairman
Committee on International Relations
United States House of Representatives
2110 Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2170
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express the bishops' concerns regarding the Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4681, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006.

The bishops' perspective on this legislation is shaped by two overriding concerns. First, H.R. 4681 should be measured in light of the ultimate goal of promoting a two-state solution that provides security for Israel and a viable state for the Palestinians, two states living alongside one another in peace. Second, the legislation should provide for the urgent needs of the Palestinian people. A further deterioration of the humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinian people compromises human dignity and serves the long term interests neither of Palestinians nor of Israelis who long for a just peace.

Mr. Chairman, the bishops are grateful that the language of the substitute now acknowledges the goal of a two-state solution, but we remain profoundly concerned that some of the provisions of the bill would directly undermine this goal. For example, the legislation rightly calls upon Hamas to renounce terrorism, recognize Israel and accept prior agreements, including the Road Map, but then forbids contact with the Palestinian Authority, "including the Palestinian Legislative Council" (page 9, lines 15-16) despite the fact that many members of the Council are not members of Hamas or a Foreign Terrorist Organization and have, in fact, renounced terrorism, recognized Israel and supported past agreements. Similarly, in section 7 and 8 the travel and representation of officials of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the United States is restricted despite the fact that the PLO has renounced terrorism, recognized Israel and negotiated the prior agreements. These actions curtail contact with moderate Palestinian leaders whose support and cooperation are crucial for pursuing a two state solution.

The bishops appreciate the steps you have taken to improve section 3 of the legislation, (e.g., the shortening of notification provisions). However, we remain profoundly concerned with the narrow definition of the exception to limitations on aid to Gaza and the West Bank in subsection (d). Especially given the deepening poverty and unemployment in the Palestinian territories, the exception ought to include more than the

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provision of services to meet “basic human health needs.” The basic human needs of the Palestinian people as they fall into deeper poverty include: “education, job training, psycho-social counseling and other humanitarian needs.” The bishops’ relief and development agency, Catholic Relief Services, reports that their assistance programs in the Palestinian Territories could be severely curtailed or ended under the proposed legislation. Other reputable, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) report similar concerns.

Another issue related to NGOs is the prohibition on all contact with the Palestinian Authority (PA). Any organization delivering assistance in the West Bank and Gaza will need to have incidental contact with the PA in order to secure permits and conform to legal requirements. This routine, non-substantial contact should not be prohibited.

Attached to this letter you will find some specific language recommendations that the Bishops’ Conference believes would help the legislation to meet two important goals – supporting a two-state solution to the conflict and alleviating the urgent human needs of the Palestinian people through aid. These goals are in the best interests of both Palestinians and Israelis who long for a just peace.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left from the start of the name.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy

Partial List of Suggested Amendments
To Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4681
by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
April 6, 2006

Goals: The goals of these and other amendments would be to support a two-state solution to the conflict and to address the growing poverty and desperation in the West Bank and Gaza in order to advance the hopes of Israelis and Palestinians for a just peace.

1. On page 1, line 17 substitute "substantive transactions" or "substantive contacts" for "contact".

Comment: This would help the policy to be consistent with existing legal requirements, page 22, line 19, the nature of private funding, and routine transactions with the Palestinian Authority (PA) that may involve registration requirements, legal fees, etc.)

2. On page 2, line 5, after Roadmap add: "unless otherwise permitted by law or this act, except that routine civil administrative transactions with the Palestinian Authority are permitted where a U.S. person would be harmed by a failure to do so".

3. On page 12, lines 5-9 substitute: "(1) Assistance to meet humanitarian needs.--The provision of food, water, medicine, sanitation services, education, job training, psycho-social counseling or other assistance to meet basic human needs notwithstanding that some assistance requires routine, but not substantive, contact with the Palestinian Authority. (2) Assistance as needed to complete projects already funded under the supervision of US AID. (3)"

Comment: The poverty and unemployment of Palestinians is deepening. It is not in the best interests of either Israelis or Palestinians for desperation to grow in the West Bank and Gaza.

4. Section 5, on page 18, lines 23 and following should be deleted.

Comment: There is a concern that this language might make it impossible to get a Commerce Department License and may conflict with existing law. This would make it impossible to engage in legitimate commercial transactions with moderate Palestinian individuals and organizations. It may also deepen the economic isolation and poverty of the Palestinian people.

5. Delete references to the PLO and the Palestinian Legislative Council page 9, line 16, and page 20, lines 3-4, 8 and 22.

Comment: It is important to preserve relationships with moderate Palestinian leaders who have rejected terrorism, recognized Israel and supported the 2-state solution. To this end, the provisions directed against contact with Hamas and Foreign Terrorist Organizations should not apply to non-Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and to the Palestine Liberation Organization of which Hamas is not a member (and which has renounced terrorism, recognized Israel and supported a 2-state solution). It is critical for a 2-state solution that the U.S. remains able to engage moderate Palestinians.