



For Circulation and Release

COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF METROPOLITAN
CHICAGO

***STATEMENT ON THE INCIDENT IN WATERS OFF GAZA
AND ISRAEL***

June 28, 2010

Over the past twenty-five years, the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago has been a forum to foster mutual understanding and cooperation between and among major world religions active in the wider Chicago area. In addition, the Council has sought to bring a religiously grounded and prophetic moral voice to the public square regarding important local, national, and international issues.

Sometimes the work of the Council reflects broad consensus and even unanimity; on other occasions it has served to allow expression and better understanding of deep differences. Seldom have these discussions and deliberations led to completely irreconcilable positions. Most often, the agreements and common ground forged in the Council's discussions and debates provide insight and guidance for members of the participating religious traditions, and offer encouragement and direction for civic leaders and the general public.

The flotilla heading toward Gaza for the declared purpose of bringing humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza was clearly in defiance of the blockade maintained by Israel and Egypt for the declared purpose of keeping weapons out of the hands of Hamas. The resulting violence and loss of life on one of the ships has evoked strong responses far beyond the Council's membership and left many issues in dispute. Among them are the following:

Is the extent of the blockade justified beyond the stated purpose of keeping weapons out of the hands of Hamas? Are there alternatives to the blockade that would not affect security concerns? Did the leadership of both parties adequately assess the conditions and take sufficient measures to reduce or avoid the possibility of violence, injury, and the loss of life? The answer to some of these and other questions may become apparent upon the completion of a thorough review of all that transpired. Some questions may remain unanswered.

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Mindful of the innocent civilians affected and living in the region, the Council urges all parties involved in this incident to participate fully in the comprehensive review of what happened and take responsibility for any violations of law and human rights that may have occurred. We call again upon all parties to commit themselves to those political, diplomatic, and non-violent avenues and processes that can lead to peace in this volatile region.

In spite of our differences, we, the members of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, strengthen our commitment to honor and respect one another and the traditions we represent, not only in our unity but also when we disagree. As we begin our second quarter century of ecumenical, inter-faith and inter-religious conversation and cooperation, we will continue to give witness to what we hope and pray will increasingly be a peaceful existence among the people of various faiths, ethnicities, and nations across the globe.

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About the Council of Religious Leaders

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago (CRLMC) was founded 25 years ago, at a time when racial tensions and social injustices were on the rise, and a group of religious leaders in Chicago recognized the growing need to understand cultural and religious differences and learn how to work together. His Eminence the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, called together the leaders of the Episcopal, Greek Orthodox and Protestant Churches, along with the Chicago Board of Rabbis to form the Council. Today the Council gathers an even greater diversity of religious leaders and institutions, enriched by the participation of such as Mormon, Muslim and Quaker faith communities, the Community Renewal Society and the Chicago Center for Cultural Connections (formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews, NCCJ, and most recently leaders of the Baha'i, Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Zoroastrian traditions. To the best of our knowledge, CRLMC is unique as a continuing inter-religious organization in the nation and likely in the world. By uniting the churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other religious assemblies, CRLMC

seeks to present a unified vision and voice on issues affecting the common good of the people of Chicago.

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