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SUBJECT: MEPP: ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S CONSULTATION: CALL ON  
ARAFAT, 19 JANUARY

SUMMARY

1. Arafat confirms to the Archbishop of Canterbury his support for the Alexandria consultation and its follow-up.

DETAIL

2. I accompanied the Archbishop of Canterbury to call on Arafat on Saturday evening (19 January). Erekat (senior Palestinian negotiator) and Arafat's key religious advisers (Christian and Muslim) were also present. I am reporting separately on the mood at Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah.

3. The Archbishop and his party set out the background to the initiative. Arafat confirmed that he supported it, and expressed particular interest in the proposed follow-up mechanism.

4. More generally, the Archbishop said that although religion was undoubtedly part of the problem in the Middle East, he hoped it could be part of the solution as well. Religious leaders needed to play their part in urging their political counterparts to abandon violence and return to the negotiating table. Only through negotiations could a way be found out of the current impasse.

5. Arafat agreed enthusiastically with the Archbishop's comments on the role which religious leaders might play. He described the situation as very serious. He laid the blame at the door of Israel, and set out - in familiar terms - why he believed Sharon was not interested in a just peace with the Palestinians.

6. The Archbishop subsequently spoke to the media on the lines of para 4 above.

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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS LEADERS' CONSULTATION ON THE MIDDLE EAST

SUMMARY

1. A meeting of religious leaders in Alexandria, convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, reaches agreement on a Declaration abhorring violence, calling for political progress, and identifying the role of religious leaders in creating an atmosphere conducive to peace. Valuable exchanges. Most remarkable was that the meeting happened at all in the present climate. Immediate impact may be limited, but a building block for the future.

DETAIL

2. The Archbishop of Canterbury has spent the last two days in Alexandria, where he convened a consultation of religious leaders from the Holy Land to exchange views on the Middle East situation. The event brought Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders together in one room, for an exchange which each, I felt, found valuable. There was pleasant surprise all round that, at such a divisive time, so much common ground was established.

3. Some eighteen religious figures took part, the main ones being:

- on the Jewish side, the Sephardi Chief Rabbi Bakshi Doron, Gush Emunim founder Menachem Fromen, and Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Rabbi Michael Melchior;

- on the Islamic side, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi (who was the co-host), and PA Minister Sheikh Tal El-Sidr, and Chief Justice of the Palestinian Sharia courts Sheikh Tamimi;

- on the Christian side, in addition to the Archbishop of Canterbury, leaders of the Latin, Armenian and Greek Catholic churches.

4. Inevitably, much time was spent finalising the conclusions. The party arrived from Tel Aviv with a text which rightly included the main Israeli concerns, eg on condemning suicide bombings

("killing innocents in the name of God is a desecration of his Holy Name"), but which was silent on some of the Palestinian points - occupation, restrictions etc. Rabbi Melchior was grudgingly constructive in reaching agreed language on the second day: a reference to implementing Mitchell and Tenet "as a first step now" broke the deadlock. The Alexandria Declaration (text in my following telegram) was finally adopted once Arafat had given his blessing, was signed (NB the English version is the only authoritative ones) and released to the media in a press conference.

5. But it was not just the negotiation of a text. Archbishop Carey's commitment and sincerity to the process elicited a good response all round. The Grand Imam's calming presence was also crucial in stilling the hotter heads on the Palestinian side. The exchanges in plenary were honest, and the pain felt by each party was set out for the others. It was a moving and rather profound occasion.

6. The Egyptian contribution has been positive. They gave political backing and helped with the conference arrangements. The Archbishop and the leaders of the Jewish and Islamic delegations are scheduled to see President Mubarak later this morning. Alexandria proved to be an excellent setting, and the Governor of Alex was vocal and warm in his support for the gathering.

7. The idea is that this is the first of a series of consultations. A permanent joint committee has been established to pursue the dialogue and to engage with political leaders. Much of the follow-up will fall to Canon Andrew White of Coventry Cathedral who was the driving force in the run up to and at the consultation.

#### COMMENT

8. Peace will not be descending on the Holy Land simply as a consequence of this meeting. But it would be wrong to deride or dismiss it. The Declaration will be helpful in rebutting any spurious religious justification for violence. And the meeting contributes to building a broader constituency for reconciliation. When the political process is in such disarray, and trust does not exist between the parties, there is a role for alternative diplomacy and the calling in of higher authority.

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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONSULTATION ON THE MIDDLE EAST: TEXT OF THEIR DECLARATION

1. The text, entitled "The First Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land" was as follows:

QUOTE

In the Name of God who is Almighty, Merciful and Compassionate, we who have gathered as religious leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, pray for true peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and declare our commitment to ending the violence and bloodshed that denies the right to life and dignity.

According to our faith traditions, killing innocents in the name of God is a desecration of his Holy Name, and defames religion in the world. The violence in the Holy Land is an evil which must be opposed by all people of good faith. We seek to live together as neighbours, respecting the integrity of each other's historical and religious inheritance. We call upon all to oppose incitement, hatred and the misrepresentation of the other.

1. The Holy Land is Holy to all three of our faiths. Therefore, followers of the divine religions must respect its sanctity, and bloodshed must not be allowed to pollute it. The sanctity and integrity of the Holy Places must be preserved, and freedom of religious worship must be ensured for all.
2. Palestinians and Israelis must respect the divinely ordained purposes of the Creator by whose grace they live in the same land that is called Holy.
3. We call on the political leaders of both peoples to work for a just, secure and durable solution in the spirit of the words of the Almighty and the Prophets.
4. As a first step now, we call for a religiously sanctioned cease-fire, respected and observed on all sides, and for the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet recommendations, including the lifting of restrictions and a return to

negotiations.

5. We seek to help create an atmosphere where present and future generations will co-exist with mutual respect and trust in the other. We call on all to refrain from incitement and demonization, and to educate our future generations accordingly.

6. As religious leaders, we pledge ourselves to continue a joint quest for a just peace that leads to reconciliation in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for the common good of all our peoples.

7. We announce the establishment of a permanent joint committee to carry out the recommendations of this declaration, and to engage with our respective political leadership accordingly.

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SUBJECT: MEPP: RELIGIOUS LEADERS' CONSULTATION: FOLLOW-UP

SUMMARY

1. Details of action in hand to follow up the Archbishop of Canterbury's Alexandria initiative.

DETAIL

2. I should record that Canon Andrew White (Coventry Cathedral) has been here this week to follow up on this initiative. He also saw Sherard Cowper-Coles and Lord Levy (both at my house).
3. White told me that he had had long and - from his perspective - successful meetings with Arafat and with the prime mover on the Israeli side, the Deputy Foreign Minister Rabbi Melchior. Both had confirmed their willingness to take part in follow-up activities.
4. The Alexandria Declaration (second TUR) provides for the establishment of a 'permanent joint committee to carry out the recommendations of this declaration'. Its key members are Melchior for the Jewish side and Sheikh Tal el Sidr, a Palestinian junior minister, for the Muslim side. The committee will meet in Jerusalem on 21 February and 21 March. White will be present on both occasions. On the latter date, the Archbishop of Canterbury himself (who will be leading a pilgrimage here at the time) will attend. The Archbishop is also considering calls on Arafat and Sharon that day.
5. The main business for the follow-up committee will be what they call 'outreach' - ie how to get the message of peace and reconciliation out from the moderates (who were present in Alexandria) to more extreme groups on either side.
6. Other activities planned in the context of the Alexandria initiative include a call on the Pope (tentatively fixed for 14

March) and visits by some of the Muslims involved to Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

ADAMS

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-----Original Message-----

**From:** Swift Incoming Telegrams (Machine 1)  
**Sent:** 20 March 2002 09:45  
**To:** MENAD  
**Subject:** LEAD: DD JERUS/FCOLN 84: MEPP: THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S CALL ON ARAFAT,  
**Importance:** High

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CORRECTED VERSION

SUBJECT: MEPP: THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S CALL ON ARAFAT,  
19 MARCH

SUMMARY

1. A confident and ebullient Arafat assures the Archbishop of Canterbury that he intends to take this opportunity to get the



DETAIL

2. The Archbishop of Canterbury is in town, leading a group of pilgrims. Tomorrow (21 March) he will chair this month's meeting of the Alexandria Declaration follow-up committee, which brings together Christians, Muslims and Jews. Late yesterday evening (19 March) I accompanied him and others to see Arafat in Ramallah.

3. Both in a plenary session and more privately, the Archbishop pressed Arafat hard to seize the opportunity which the Zinni mission offered to get the peace process back on track. Politicians on both sides needed to show real leadership if the cycle of violence was to be broken.

4. In response, Arafat said that his main current problem was the suffering of his people. The recent Israeli incursions into Palestinian towns had not only caused extensive material damage: people had been terrorized. Hospitals had been starved of supplies. The Israelis had acted in a wanton and cruel fashion. What could possibly justify shooting up a statue of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem?

5. Nevertheless, Arafat agreed that a window of opportunity had opened for peace. Among recent positive developments, he singled out US sponsorship of UNSCR 1397, which called for a Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel, and the re-emergence of the Israeli peace lobby.

6. Arafat said that against that background, a meeting of the Palestinian leadership which he had just chaired had taken a firm decision for peace. The Palestinians would abide scrupulously by their commitments. They would do their best to stop violence and protect the peace. He would himself follow up personally.



7. Arafat affected not to be bothered either way over whether he had a meeting with Cheney. A meeting, if it happened, would make no difference to the situation on the ground.

8. Finally, the Archbishop thanked Arafat for his support for the Alexandria initiative. Arafat warmly agreed that people other than diplomats and politicians could contribute to the search for peace.

COMMENT

9. Arafat was on notably good form: cheerful, ebullient and in good shape physically.

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