United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905
March 23, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

Securing peace in the Middle East between Israel and all of her neighbors has been a long-term goal of the United States- long before and quite apart from the current conflict in Iraq - and we support your efforts to advance that important goal.

We know how deeply the people of Israel long for peace, and we are mindful of all the avenues successive Israeli governments have pursued to achieve it: bilateral negotiations, multilateral negotiations, and unilateral actions. Unfortunately, those efforts have yet to bring a lasting peace, largely because there has been no viable Palestinian leader ready to negotiate an end to the conflict who has the strength and conviction to compromise and then to implement an agreement. This sad fact remains as true today as it has ever been.

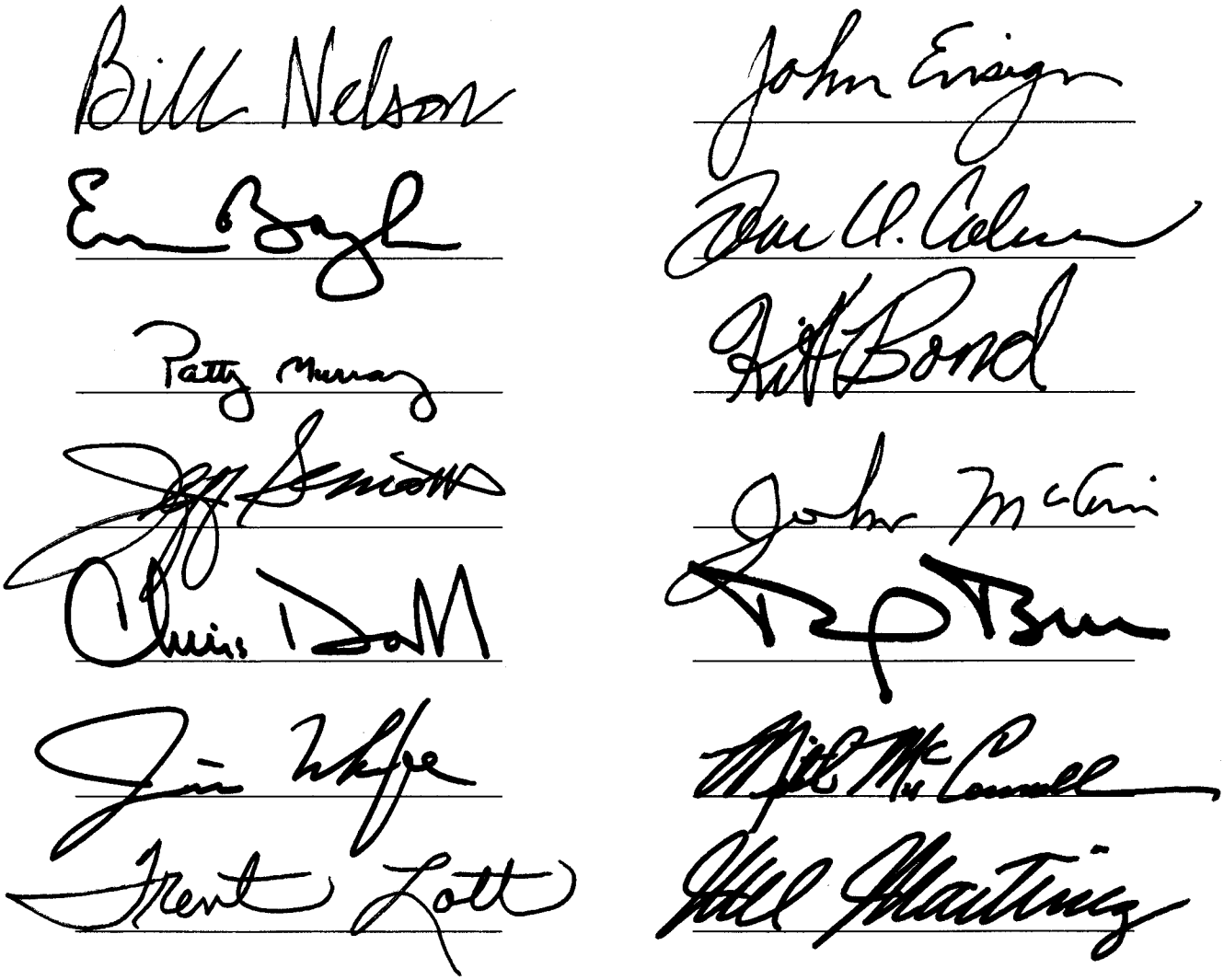
That is why, as you seek to reinvigorate the peace process, we believe it important to reinforce certain basic principles that have guided US Middle East policy that we know you share. First among these principles is securing the three very basic obligations put forward by the Quartet that the Palestinian Authority must meet in order for it to receive direct aid from the international community: recognition of Israel's right to exist, a renunciation of violence and terror, and acceptance of previous Israeli – Palestinian agreements. So far, as a result of the international community's firm unity on these obligations, this policy has had real impact, with pressure mounting on the Hamas-led PA to do what is necessary in order for international assistance to resume.

The pressure to form a Palestinian unity government is a manifestation of that impact. We were deeply disappointed, however, that last month's Mecca agreement negotiated between the leaders of Hamas and Fatah failed to meet or even address the obligations of the Quartet. Statements by Hamas leaders since the agreement was signed and the new unity government was announced only reinforce that fact. While the agreement might have brought a temporary peace between Hamas and Fatah, it had little to do with making peace with Israel and ultimately does not serve the interests of the Palestinian people.

We know that there are already some in the Quartet who are pressing for direct aid to resume. That would be a huge step back from the peace process you seek to invigorate. Since the election and installation of a Hamas-dominated Palestinian government, it has been US policy not to have contact with that government nor provide aid directly to it. We urge you to maintain current US policy with respect to the Palestinian government until it recognizes Israel's right to exist, renounce terror, and accept previous agreements.

We know that these are principles that you helped develop and certainly share. It is our strong hope that they remain central to your efforts and to those of the Quartet as the process moves forward.

Sincerely,



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