July 6, 2016

Re: 2016 Civil Discourse Platform Plank

Dear Party Chairs, Platform Chairs, and Delegates:

This fall, Americans will cast their ballots and choose elected officials whose decisions will shape our nation for decades. As the world becomes more interconnected, our economy realigns, and our politics evolves, it is critical that we affirm our shared core values: free thought, mutual respect, and civic engagement.

Our nation was – and still is – a great experiment in democracy and diversity. We believe in an engaged citizenry and vibrant public discourse. In that spirit, we, the undersigned organizations, urge that you consider adopting the following paragraphs in your party’s platform this year:

Statement on Civil Discourse during Elections and Beyond

We, as Americans, enjoy a rich tradition of political discourse, ideological diversity, and debate. This diversity can be a durable source of strength. A vigorous exchange of ideas featuring different perspectives allows us to experiment with varied approaches and arrive at effective public policy solutions that help improve the lives of us all. Held in a spirit of respect, this exchange can allow us to find common ground when warranted and foster a more united America.

However, at times, particularly during elections, political discourse can become needlessly acrimonious and undermine the spirit of engagement and citizenship among Americans. Such discord can pull us apart and make it more, not less, difficult to find common ground or even maintain neighborly relations. Moreover, shrill political discussion can cross the line, and spread intolerance and bigotry. Especially during elections, when divisions are most pronounced, we must be vigilant in preventing political discourse from drawing on deep-seated resentment and intolerance.
We call upon our party officials, elected representatives and party delegates, as well as all Americans, to engage during this election season in a thoughtful, respectful, and civil discussion over the future direction of this country. We strive to make our politics represent the best of our American values -- free thought, mutual respect, and civic engagement.

These words are designed to demonstrate leadership and reflect a commitment to spirited and thoughtful public debate. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you.

Respectfully,

American Humanist Association
Anti-Defamation League
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Church World Service
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
HIAS
Interfaith Alliance
Islamic Networks Group (ING) and Affiliates
Islamic Society of North America
J Street
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Women International (JWI)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches, USA
National Council of Jewish Women
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas’ Extended Justice Team
The Center on Conscience & War
The Jewish Labor Committee
The Rabbinical Assembly
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Tr'nah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice & Witness Ministries
Uri L'Tzedek: The Orthodox Social Justice Movement