

A Call from Jerusalem to the World

Palestinian Christians are dying to LIVE with dignity and freedom

Dear Bishops & Church Leaders,

Salaam and Grace to you from the city of our faith in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are writing to you as Palestinian Christian leaders concerned for the dramatic situation of the Christians in the land of the Holy One. In contrast to 10 years ago our community now represents less than 2% of the population and continues to decrease at an alarming rate. This is largely due to emigration. Many Palestinian Christians are leaving as a result of the ongoing conflict.

We are a Christian community made up of Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Episcopalians and Lutherans bound together by a common identity and have been witnessing together for the Risen Lord since the first Pentecost. Despite tensions and historical differences our community is unified in its identity and we enjoy close fraternal ecumenical relations.

The Israeli illegal occupation has made it impossible for Christians, indeed for the whole Palestinian people of whom we are an integral part, to live with dignity, freedom and security. Palestinians Christians like all Palestinians want to live in peace and justice. We yearn for freedom and life abundant.

In addition to the other injustices of the occupation we must now contend with the Separation Wall. The Wall splinters our community in many pieces and makes it impossible to maintain normal family, economic and human relations. Families are separated and divided and for many there is no legal hope for family reunification. Human rights violations and lack of freedom of movement, association and expression is the daily lot of the Palestinian Christians, indeed, of all Palestinians.

There are positive signs but there is still a long way to go and much will be lost if peace is further delayed. The international community and the world church must insist that both parties, Palestinians and Israelis, fulfill their obligations according to international legitimacy.

As Christian Churches we have always denounced the use of violence. We are committed to a non-violent struggle for peace, justice and reconciliation. We proclaim a vision that will allow peace and justice to embrace in a spirit of reconciliation that rejects violence, occupation, domination and extremism in favor of reconstructing communities for co existence and mutual wellbeing.

We want security for Israel and we want freedom and justice for Palestinians. Therefore we are still committed to a "two state solution" where Israel and Palestine will live side by side equally, justly and in peace. We believe in Jerusalem as a city of Peace shared by Muslims, Jews and Christians. We also believe that Jerusalem should serve as the Capital for Palestine and Israel.

We are calling on both Israelis and Palestinians to see God in the other and accept the humanity of the other and recognize each other's human, civil, religious and political rights. Once we recognize our common humanity and rights peace with justice becomes a reality.

We call upon you to:

1. Support community based education through Christian schools and educational institutions.
2. Stop emigration of Christians through job creation.
3. Provide low cost housing. Housing is a social right not a luxury.
4. Strengthen Christian Social institutions. These organizations provide needed services to all in Palestinian society regardless of religion, gender or political affiliation.

We trust that you will join your hands with ours so that together we can realize the dream for a just peace and reconciliation. A just peace will guarantee the presence and witness of the Palestinian Christians who are the Living Stones in His land.

We believe that the churches can and must do more to recognize their duty towards the Holy Land and act together to sensitize their governments, their people and the international community. Our communities ask your help so that justice will prevail and so that Palestinian Christians will flourish in the Holy Land and be strengthened to carry out our mission in the power of the Resurrection.

With St. Paul we affirm: *"That if one member suffers all suffer with it. If one member is honored all rejoice together with it."* I Cor. 12:26

In this Easter season we pray that the peace, power and joy of our Risen Lord will remain with you always. Pray for us and pray and work for the peace of Jerusalem.
Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed!

+ **Michel Sabbah**

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

+ **Riah Abu EI-Assal**

Diocese of Jerusalem

The Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East

+ **Munib Younan**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land