

Higher Presidential Committee
of Churches Affairs in Palestine



اللجنة الرئاسية العليا لمتابعة
شؤون الكنائس في فلسطين (HCC)



Ramallah, August 15, 2023

Your Beatitudes and Grace,

I would like to take this opportunity to convey the warm greetings of President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian people to you and to all our friends.

I am writing to draw your urgent attention to Israel's targeted and escalating crimes and systematic aggression against Christian Holy Sites, properties, Palestinian Christians, and thousands of years of Christian heritage in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem.

In this regard, over the past few months, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have been issuing dozens of statements condemning the escalating Israeli attacks on Christian and Muslim Holy sites, which undermines the Status Quo and the unique, spiritual, religious, and cultural identity of occupied Jerusalem. It also threatens to perverse the situation even further and ignite a religious war aimed at expelling Palestinian Christians from our homes, our churches, and our Holy Land

In this respect, I would like to share with you the latest violations against Palestinian Christians and Christian Holy Sites in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem:

- Over the prolonged belligerent Israeli occupation, Palestinian Christians have been suffering from Israel's discriminatory policies and practices, including illegal land confiscation, expropriation of properties, restrictions on freedom of worship, attacks on holy sites, in addition to persecution and harassment of religious personnel.
- Since the start of this year, Palestinian Christians have witnessed an alarmingly increased level of hostility and attacks by extremist Jewish settlers, including physical and verbal harassment, vandalism and attacks on churches on a daily basis.
- This year, countless hate crimes against Christians were documented in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. For instance, an

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Armenian priest in Jerusalem reported to have been spat on over 90 times so far this year.

- From graffiti, that reads "death to Christians", to cursing and violent physical assaults, Palestinian Christians, particularly in Jerusalem, are facing a shocking increase in attacks following the establishment of an extremist government in Israel.
- Today, the 13,000 Christians of Jerusalem make up just 1 percent of the population of the Holy City, and suffer from systematic discrimination, that translates into acts of hatred against them, under the watch and encouragement of Israeli officials and forces. It is important to note that most of the attacks on Christians in Jerusalem go unreported. For example:
 - On the first day of the year, about 30 graves in the Mount Zion Protestant Cemetery were toppled over and vandalized by extremist Israeli settlers and have not yet been repaired.
 - In January also, Israeli extremist settlers attacked the Armenian Convent of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem and climbed the Patriarchate's walls to remove its flag. Further, a group of radical settlers attacked an Armenian restaurant at the New Gate in the Christian Quarter of the occupied city of Jerusalem, and threw chairs toward the restaurant and those who had been seated there. The attack came as extremist Israeli settlers cursed and chanted 'Death to Arabs' near Damascus Gate in occupied Jerusalem.
 - In February, three extremist Israeli settlers stormed the Church of the Condemnation, located at the Second Station of the Via Dolorosa, smashed a statute of Jesus and attempted to set the church on fire.
 - In March, Two Israeli extremist settlers broke into the Church of Gethsemane in the occupied city of Jerusalem, tried to sabotage the properties inside the church, and attacked the priests during Sunday Mass while hurling abusive remarks.
- These acts are not incidental or random, they are systematic, planned and emboldened by incitement and racist rhetoric and structured persecution and



oppression against Christians and Christianity, and are part of a repeating pattern of attacks against Christian holy sites.

- The assaults are inherent in Israel's illegal occupation and years of systematic and structural subordination and discrimination against the Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, to ensure Jewish supremacy and erasure of Palestinian history and identity.
- Israel's militarization of Christian religious ceremonies, and imposition of punitive measures through the combination of restrictions on access to churches, the subjugation of Holy Sites, and the brutal incessant violence inflicted on worshippers, violates the historical and legal Status Quo. For example:
 - In April and during Easter celebrations, Israeli forces attacked Palestinian Christians and filled the gates of the Old City of Jerusalem with blocks and barriers, allowing only small numbers of Christians to enter. They also obstructed traffic in Khan Al-Zeit market and assaulted dozens of worshippers trying to cross the checkpoints and reach the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Also, days prior to the Holy Fire Saturday, footage shows extremist Israeli settlers spitting at Christian nuns as they walked down the Via Dolorosa, a historical path in the old city of occupied East Jerusalem.
- Israel, the occupying Power, has long aimed to alter the historical and legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem to ensure Jewish exclusivity and dominance, including through war crimes of forcible displacement, demolitions, and control over holy sites, all in violation of international law, including United Nations resolutions.
- These acts and practices have far-reaching consequences, and create a coercive environment that threatens Palestinian Christians' presence in Jerusalem. The timing of these assaults during celebrations is not coincidental, as they aim to ignite a religious war and expel Palestinian Christians from their homes, their churches, and their Holy Land.
- Continued attacks against Muslim holy sites further highlight the systematic nature of such assaults that threaten to erase Jerusalem's pluralistic character



and reflect an innate disdain and hostility for Christianity and Islam. This is evident in the calls of extremist Jewish settlers to destroy Al-Aqsa Mosque and build the Jewish Temple in its place.

- Attacks on Churches, holy sites and Christian properties, are a persistent occurrence, that is not receiving the appropriate reaction, locally or internationally, despite appeals, requests, and protests made by the Churches of the Holy Land. For example:
 - In June, an Israeli settler threw stones and smashed the stained-glass windows of the room of the Last Supper in Jerusalem, known as the Cenacle.
 - During the Catholic Pentecost ceremony on Mount Zion, south of Jerusalem's Old City, about 20 ultra-Orthodox Jews blew trumpets and cursed loudly to sabotage the ceremony. Loud noises, curses and harassment is practiced daily by extremist Jewish settlers, particularly in the Christian Quarter in order to create a coercive environment for Christians living in the old city of Jerusalem.
 - In July, Two Israeli extremist armed settlers stormed the Orthodox Church complex in the Mount Zion area of occupied Jerusalem, spread items on the church ground and announced they would remain there. When a church official asked them to leave, the settlers started shouting insults and racist slurs towards him, telling him to "get out" of the grounds, and claiming, "Mount Zion belongs to the Jewish people".
 - These attacks are not only directed at Christians in the Occupied Territory, but also target Palestinian Christians beyond the green line. During the months of July and August, the Church and Monastery of Saint Elias in Haifa -also known as Stella Maris Monastery- was attacked several times and the attacks are still ongoing. On July 23, about 50 Israeli extremist settlers tried to break into the church. Local Christians and Muslims protected the Monastery from the attacks while the Israeli Police did nothing.



- o In another incident, a group from a religious Jewish institute run by Rabbi Eliezer Berland were directed by the Rabbi to attack the same Monastery claiming rights to the place.

To this end, the State of Palestine urges your Excellencies and the international community to take urgent action and condemn Israel's crimes and attacks on Christian properties and to take public and concrete steps to defend Christian holy sites and Christian presence in Jerusalem and occupied Palestine.

Attacks on Christian holy sites, properties, heritage, and identity constitute a violation of international law, which explicitly calls for the protection of religious sites in Jerusalem and for the need to respect the basic human right to worship freely, especially in Jerusalem, a city that is a witness to the most significant events in Christian history and faith.

We therefore ask for urgent intervention and support to counter all efforts that threaten the Christian existence in Palestine and undermine the integral role of Christianity in the Palestinian society and our region.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sincerely yours,





Ramzi Khouri

Head of the Palestinian Higher Presidential
Committee for Churches Affairs

