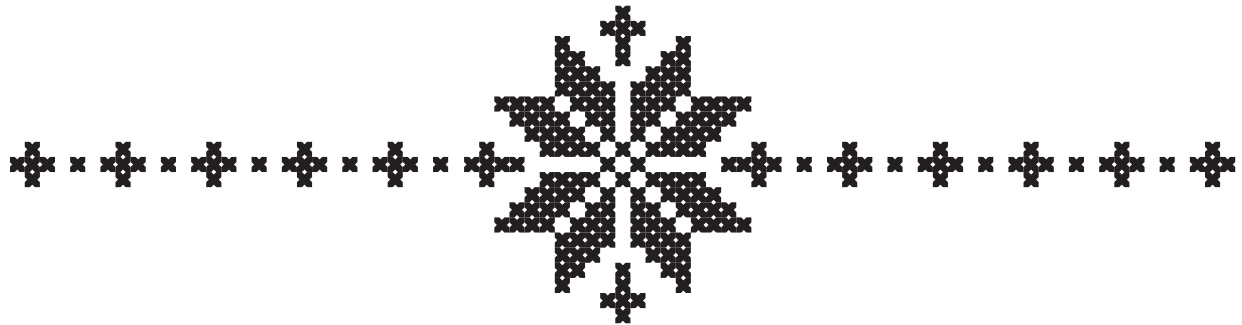


# THE CHRISTIANS OF PALESTINE



## **Role of Palestinian Christians in society before Nakba**

Palestinian Christians have been an integral part of Palestinian society since the birth of Christianity in Palestine, the Holy Land. Their contribution to Palestine's rich history and heritage is invaluable. That is also true in relation to Palestine's modern history, nationalism, and the long struggle for Palestine's overdue freedom.

Prior to 1948, dozens of Christian towns and villages dotted the landscape across historical Palestine. In fact, from the 17 principal towns in Palestine before 1948, at least four had a considerable Christian majority (Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Ramallah and Nazareth), while others like Gaza, Ramleh, Lydda, Beisan, Shafa Amr, Akka and Beisan had important Palestinian Christian concentrations. Mixed cities like Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa and Safad also boasted a considerable Christian population. The biggest concentrations of Palestinian Christians were in the Galilee, the Coast (especially Haifa and Jaffa) and Jerusalem (especially its western side like Upper Bakaa, Talbiya and Katamon).

### **Jerusalem Christians**

In the 1920's, wealthy and educated Christians who comprised over 90% of the Palestinian Christian population began to reside in southwestern Jerusalem neighborhood such as Upper and Lower Ba'qa, Talbiyeh and the German Colony. Nearly half of the Christian Arab Population of Jerusalem lived in the western half of the city. By the mid-1940's, the Palestinian Christian population in Jerusalem more than doubled and the city became the largest Christian center in Palestine.

## I. Role of Palestinian Christians in Society before 1948

Palestine's Christians were an urban-class (at least 70% of the total Christian population up until 1931). At least 70% of Palestinian Christian males over age twenty-one were literate.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Palestinian Christians were prominent pioneers in media and education. A good example is the well-known Palestinian intellectual Khalil al Sakakini, who opened the first prominent secular school in Palestine in 1909.<sup>2</sup> There were also several religious initiatives in education, including schools opened across Palestine by the Latin Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church. Prominent among these initiatives was the well-known "Al Moscowiya" in Beit Jala, which was the first school for girls in Palestine, established in 1780.<sup>3</sup> The school taught Palestinian girls, Muslims and Christians alike. It is noteworthy that by 1948, Palestine boasted 868 schools, catering to 146,883 students and run by 4,600 Arab teachers.

The two major newspapers in Palestine prior to World War I were "Al Karmel" in the Mediterranean port of Haifa and "Filastin" in Jaffa. Both were owned by Christians; *Al-Karmel* was founded by-journalist Najib Nassar and *Filastin* by Issa al Issa, who had links to the movement of Arab nationalists.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Palestine-Remembered/Story559.html>

<sup>2</sup> MUSLIH, Muhammad (1988) "The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism". New York: Columbia University Press. P 26

<sup>3</sup> Municipality of Beit Jala publication (2004), pg. 43

<sup>4</sup> AYYAD, Abdelaziz (1999) "Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians: 1859-1939". Jerusalem: Passia. P 47.

## **II. Role of Palestinian Christians in Seeking Independence before 1948**

In the history of modern-day Palestinian nationalism, the first important Palestinian political groups were the Muslim-Christian Associations organized in the main cities of Palestine, including Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem. Together with feminist and workers' organizations, they were the driving force behind the realization of the First Palestinian National Congress in 1919.

Founded in 1918, the Muslim-Christian Association of Jerusalem, had 28 Muslim and 10 Christian representatives (5 representing the Orthodox Church and 5 others representing the Catholic Church. The ratio of Christian representation was higher than that of the Jerusalem population (40.000 Muslims and 14.000 Christians) but it reflected the active engagement of this important sector in seeking Palestinian freedom as well as its markedly high level of education and financial contribution to the economy.<sup>5</sup>

One year after its establishment, the Muslim-Christian Association in Jerusalem sent a bulletin to ambassadors and political authorities, particularly the British, rejecting Britain's "Balfour Declaration", which promised the Zionist Congress a state in Palestine.

The first Palestinian National Congress convened in Jerusalem in February 1919. In attendance were delegates representing the different cities and regions, as well as members of notable Christian and Muslim families from all across the country.

During the six-month general strike of 1936 against British policies in Palestine, the main Palestinian political movement was the Arab Higher Committee, which was the official representative of the Palestinian people. The Committee was a union comprised of two representatives of the three main Palestinian Arab parties, two of which had a Christian and Muslim representing them (Al-Arabi Party appointed Jamal Al-Husseini and Alfred Rock and Ad-Difa Party appointed Ragheb Al-Nashashibi and Yacoub Farraj).

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations adopted resolution 181 (II), which partitioned Palestine and gave the Zionist Organization almost 60% of Palestine on which to establish Israel.<sup>6</sup> The resolution, unprecedented in its nature, was never repeated in the history of the United Nations. It was also adopted without the consultation of Palestine's representatives, who rejected the resolution.

During this period, Palestinian Christian nationalists continued to be active participants in Palestine's political life. For example, three of the most important aides of Haj Amin Al-Husseini were Emile Al-Ghouri, Izzat Tannous and Issa Nakhleh. Alfred Rock was the deputy chairman of the Arab Palestinian Party that supported Haj Amin Al-

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Jaffa/Jaffa/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/181\(II\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/181(II))

Husseini. Among the members of the Executive Committee of that party, chaired by Jamal Husseini, were Yusuf Sahyoun, Hanna Khalif and Emile Al-Ghouri.

Churches also opposed the UN partition plan. In March 1948, representatives of the eleven Christian denominations in Palestine made an appeal to the United Nations and to the world religious and political bodies. In the appeal, they declared,

“It is our firm conviction that peace will not be restored nor would any endeavours made for the promotion of the “peace of Jerusalem” be crowned with success, unless those bodies who undertake the determination of the future of Palestine would remove the causes which have made a battlefield of the Holy Land, reestablish the principle of justice and maintain the right of self-determination as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations Organization.

The Christian Union wishes to declare, in unequivocal terms, that they denounce the partition plan, being of the strong conviction that this plan involves a violation of the sacredness of the Holy Land, which by its nature and history, is indivisible, and represents an encroachment on the natural rights of the Arabs, the people of the country”.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, Christians like the intellectual Henry Kattan and the historian Samy Hadawi became spokespersons of the Palestinian national movement, including at the United Nations and several commissions formed before and after the United Nations partition resolution, adopted on 29 November 1947. Since 1977, the United Nations marks 29 November of each year as the international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people<sup>8</sup>, who continue to be denied the basic right to self-determination and independence.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter14\\_1of3.htm#396\\_pcopa](http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter14_1of3.htm#396_pcopa)

<sup>8</sup> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/312/75/IMG/NR031275.pdf?OpenElement>

## **NAKBA**

The State of Israel was officially declared in May 1948 over the majority of the land of historic Palestine. For almost a year before that and months following this date, approximately 800,000 Palestinians (67% of the population at the time), were forcibly expelled from their homeland by Israeli forces and militias and remain to this day dispossessed refugees. Palestinians commemorate this period as their Nakba, or Catastrophe.

## **I. Nakba and Palestine's Christians**

Between 1947 and 1949, the Israeli army and militias dispossessed almost 90,000 Palestinian Christians, or about two thirds of the Palestinian Christian population of 117,450, from historic Palestine, along with hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> This turned most of Palestine's Christians into refugees, including thousands who remained inside Israeli borders. Their basic right of return continues to be denied by Israel.

The Nakba greatly affected Palestinian Christians, especially in large cities like Jerusalem, where half of the Christian population that lived in the western suburbs of the city were forcibly expelled from their homes. The economic devastation of dispossession as well as the sense of insecurity it created significantly affected the ratio of Palestinian Christian immigration, further diminishing their numbers. Between 1944 and 1961, the Palestinian Christian population in Jerusalem dropped from 29,350 to 10,982.<sup>10</sup> Other cities suffered similar fates.

In July 1968, His Beatitude Maximos V Hakim, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, expressed his apprehension that Christianity could not survive in the Holy Land under existing conditions. He recalled certain events, which he had witnessed since the creation of Israel in 1948.

"The Melchite church has suffered many losses at the hands of the Israelis. We lost churches in Damound, Suhmata, Kufor Bir'em and Ikret, a village which the Israeli army destroyed on Christmas Day 1952.. Many churches were damaged in the 1967 war, and many churches were desecrated by soldiers and men and women entering these Holy Places indecently dressed and with their dogs. My encounters with the Israeli government officials, particularly since the last war, have been completely disheartening ... On June 21, 1967, I met with Pope Paul at the Vatican to discuss the Vatican stand on the situation and the problems facing the Christian community within Israel and the occupied territories. From the discussion I learned the Vatican offers 100% support for the U.N. resolutions on Jerusalem...Upon my return to Israel, I presented this stand to the government, and a high Israeli spokesman whom I prefer not to name for my own sake, made this remark: 'Your Pope is a foolish man. He is the only one who believes in the United Nations. If the Pope has an army, let him send it. We will give up Jerusalem only in defeat.' Such an Israeli attitude combined with their restrictions upon the indigenous Arab Christian population cannot help but doom Christianity in the Holy Land."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sabeel.org/pdfs/the%20sabeel%20survey%20-%20english%202008.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Christians in Jerusalem: A Minority at Risk, by Daphne Tsimhoni, Journal of Human Rights

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter14\\_1of3.htm#395\\_aboj](http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter14_1of3.htm#395_aboj)

For more information on Nakba, visit:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3-pse0GoKk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3-pse0GoKk)

[www.zochrot.org/en](http://www.zochrot.org/en)

[www.badil.org](http://www.badil.org)

[www.palestineremembered.org](http://www.palestineremembered.org)

iNakba free application



## II. Villages Destroyed During Nakba

During the Nakba, Israeli forces destroyed and depopulated over 400 Palestinian villages and towns. Their memory of dispossession and pain are all similar to one another. Here are some of their stories.

### Iqrith<sup>12</sup>



Iqrith before Nakba (most likely 1939).

Source: All That Remains by Walid Khalidi, published in <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Iqrit/ar/Picture193.html>

The village of Iqrith lies in the heights of Upper Galilee, some 15 miles northeast of Acre. In 1948, its population numbered about 600 people who lived in approximately 80 homes, a big Church and a private elementary school, built and administrated by the Greek Catholic Archdiocese.<sup>13</sup>

Iqrith's inhabitants made their living by growing crops and herding sheep, goats and cattle. They cultivated close to 4,500 dunoms of seasonal crops, including tobacco, legumes, olive groves, figs, pomegranates, and grapes while the remainder of their land was devoted to grazing. (1 dunom equals 1,000 square meters)

The Israeli army forcibly expelled the entire population of Iqrith on 1 November 1948.<sup>14</sup> The residents took their quest to return to their homes to Israel's Supreme Court, which ruled on 31 July 1951 that they should return to their homes. That decision was never implemented. On Christmas Day 1952, the Israeli army destroyed and razed the village to the ground, leaving only the Church and cemetery standing. In 1953, the State of Israel seized Iqrith's lands under the Expropriation for Public Purposes Law, which allowed such land takeovers for alleged defense or agricultural development purposes.

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<sup>12</sup> [www.iqrit.org/?LanguageId=1&System=Item&MenuId=11&PMenuId=11&MenuTemplateId=1&CategoryId=8&ItemId=47&ItemTemplateId=1](http://www.iqrit.org/?LanguageId=1&System=Item&MenuId=11&PMenuId=11&MenuTemplateId=1&CategoryId=8&ItemId=47&ItemTemplateId=1)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Iqrit/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Iqrit/index.html>

Under this law, Iqrith's lands were now owned by the state and, from 1960 onwards, by the State Land Administration.

Today, survivors of the Nakba and their descendants live in towns within the boundaries of present-day Israel, including Rame, Haifa and Kafr Yasif. They continue to visit what remains of their village and pray in the Church. After years of legal battles, Israel permitted them to bury their dead in the village cemetery, which they renovated. They also continue to use the Church for prayers and special ceremonies, including baptisms, holidays, and weddings.

### **Suhmata**



**Suhmata in 1950 before the village was destroyed.**

**Source:** <http://zochrot.org/sites/default/files/suhmata.jpeg>

Approximately 1200 people lived in Suhmata in 1948, a small village northeast of Akka (Acre). Suhmata boasted 2,110 dunoms of olive orchards (1 dunom equals 1 thousand square meters). The village had two neighborhoods, with the lower neighborhood hosting the Church, which was also home to the elementary school established by the Ottomans in 1886. The upper neighborhood to the east was home to a fortress built by the crusaders and excavated in 1923<sup>15</sup>. Suhmata was majority Muslim. Yet, the final word in the village was that of Qaisar Samaan, a Christian dignitary, as he enjoyed the unanimous support and respect of the village residents. Records show that Samaan even oversaw dealings with the Sharia courts.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> All that Remains by Walid Khalidi- page 29/30

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/haq-alawda/item/295-article10>

On 28 October 1948, Israeli warplanes bombarded Suhmata before ground troops entered the village. Sixteen people died in the onslaught. Najiyeh Asad Sulaiman, a refugee who survived the attack, later recounted, “We headed to Lebanon and saw the bombs striking the village from a distance. My father was sick and he could not leave. He laid under an olive tree and told us to get out. But after a while, we snuck back in and brought him to Baalbek (Lebanon), where he died. People left in a craze. Some were carrying their children on their shoulders.... People started throwing their belongings on the side of the road. The road to Lebanon is long... The planes chased us to Lebanon.... We stayed in Baalback for three years; we used to sleep on the floor; we had nothing, no assistance. We were finally able to return through the Red Cross”<sup>17</sup>.

Approximately 7% of Suhmata residents remained in present-day Israel while the rest are now refugees living in Lebanon, Syria, and other countries. Those Suhmata refugees who managed to stay were not allowed back to their homes in the village, which Israel razed to the ground in 1951.

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### **Al-Bassa<sup>18</sup>**



**Al Bassa before Nakba**

Source: <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/al-Bassa/ar/Picture2984.html>

Al-Bassa was a markedly vibrant town in Palestine before Al-Nakba in 1948. Situated in the northeast of historical Palestine, the town was close to the Lebanese border.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/haq-alawda/item/295-article10>

<sup>18</sup> [http://zochrot.org/sites/default/files/albasa\\_small.pdf](http://zochrot.org/sites/default/files/albasa_small.pdf)

Al-Bassa is a historic town most likely dating back to the Canaanites. During the Roman Era, the village was referred to as Bezeth and in the recordings of historian Imad Al-Din Al-Asfahani (died in 1201), he referred to it as Ain Al-Bassa. Archeological remains of an ancient village were found in Al-Bassa, including mosaic floors, wells, and tombs carved in the rocks. In 1932, the Palestinian archeological department also uncovered a Christian cemetery with coins and glasswork dating back to the fourth century AD.

By 1948, Al-Bassa's recorded population was approximately 4000, the majority of whom were Christian Palestinians of the Orthodox and Catholic denominations.

In 1922, the residents established their first local Council. Al-Bassa had an elementary school for boys that was established by the Ottomans in 1882 in addition to a government school for girls as well as a private school run by the Church and another elementary school established by German missionaries, who also established a clinic in Al-Bassa. The town had three churches, a mosque, and several shrines. The workers' union was active in Bassa, which had its own chapter in the town and had set up several cooperative shops there. Al-Bassa had over 20 stores and cafes. Residents also worked in different crafts, including soap manufacturing. The town had its own hotel, a bus station, and a famous park on the edge of town near the sea.

In May 1948, residents of Al-Bassa were forcibly expelled from their hometown. Israel then razed the homes, shops and cafes of Al-Bassa to the ground. Today, only ruins of the homes in Al-Bassa remain in addition to the run down Orthodox and Catholic Churches as well as the mosque, whose minaret was torn down, the town's hotel, and the shell of the German missionaries' school and clinic.

In 2000, lawyer Wakim Wakim, became the first of descendants of Al-Bassa refugees to baptize his daughter in the derelict Orthodox Church, which was used until the mid-1980's as a sheep pen by Israelis living in nearby towns and Kibbutzim's. Since then, first-generation refugees of Al-Bassa and their descendants who now live in nearby Palestinian-Israeli towns come to clean the church and use it to celebrate their special occasions, including baptisms and weddings.

On 7 May 2014, the baptism of 3 year-old Zayed Ihab Nicola was disrupted by the Israeli residents of the nearby town of Shlomi. They encircled the Church and honked their car horns and shouted anti-Christian profanities throughout the proceedings. Journalist Zuheir Mata was invited by the family to photograph the event. He was assaulted by a woman in the mob, who broke his camera. "She cursed me and the others present, calling us stinking Christians and other names and curses...It was embarrassing and humiliating."<sup>19</sup> The incident and others like it were condemned by the

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.587696>

Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land, who decried “acts of vandalism and profanation against Christian sites in Galilee”.<sup>20</sup> The Shlomi Council Chairman has pledged to close off the Church and bar Al-Bassa refugees from entering it again.

### **Kufor Bar'em**



**Kufor Bir'em before Nakba.**

**Source:** <http://www.arabs48.com/?mod=articles&ID=86755>

On 13 October 1948, Israeli troops entered Kufor Bar'em, Palestine's only Maronite-majority village and the Safad District's only Christian village, and ordered the town's 1050 residents to leave within 48 hours and head 5 kilometers to the north (Lebanon).<sup>21</sup> They were told their displacement would only last two weeks.

Families took shelter in nearby caves and orchards. After two weeks of braving the cold temperatures and lack of amenities, Kufor Bar'em refugees took shelter in the nearby Palestinian village of Al-Jish, whose residents had been expelled. The abandoned homes of Al-Jish were not enough to house all fleeing families. Some moved to other villages while others sought refuge in nearby Lebanese villages, namely Rmeish.

Kufor Bar'em refugees did not lose hope in returning to their village. They kept returning to their homes and orchards, braving arrests and deportations.<sup>22</sup> Like other displaced Palestinian refugees, they also sought a ruling from Israel's High Court to return to their homes to no avail. In July 1953, Israeli warplanes bombarded the village

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=21332>

<sup>21</sup> <http://palestine.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=77>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.badil.org/index.php?page=shop.product\\_details&flypage=garden\\_flypage.tpl&category\\_id=2&product\\_id=2&vmcchk=1&option=com\\_virtuemart&Itemid=4](http://www.badil.org/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=garden_flypage.tpl&category_id=2&product_id=2&vmcchk=1&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=4)

and leveled it to the ground, save for the Church and school. The distraught refugees watched from a nearby hill as their homes were reduced to rubble.

Even after losing their homes, Kufor Bar'em residents did not give up. They continue to lobby for their right to return to their village and recover their private property. Since the 1970's, their case gained increasing international attention and solidarity although the Israeli government's position on the issue remained obstinate. To date, refugees from Kufor Bar'em and their descendants continue their attempts to return to their town. They now hold sermon at the village's dilapidated Church, including baptisms and weddings.

### **III. Churches Destroyed and Damaged During Nakba**

In 1922, there were 196 monasteries and churches across Palestine. Only 48 churches and 47 monasteries were left after the Palestinian Nakba, or Catastrophe, of 1948.<sup>23</sup>

#### ***Some of the Christian institutions destroyed or damaged by Israeli forces in Jerusalem<sup>24</sup> and elsewhere in 1948:***

1. The Hospice "Notre Dame de France," a large part of which was destroyed.
2. The Convent of Reparatrice Sisters was set on fire and almost completely destroyed.
3. The tower and church of the Monastery of the Benedictine Fathers were damaged.
4. The Seminary of Saint Anne was hit by two mortar bombs: the first on May 17, 1948, the second on May 19, 1948, destroying walls and wounding the refugees sheltered therein.
5. The church of St. Constantine and Helena which is contiguous to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was damaged on May 17, 1948, by a bomb, the fragments of which damaged also the dome of the Holy Sepulchre.
6. The Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate was hit by about one hundred mortar bombs fired by Israeli forces from the Monastery of the Benedictine Fathers on Mount Zion, and the bombs damaged St. Jacob's Convent, the Archangels Convent and their two churches, their two Elementary and Seminary schools and their library. Eight persons among the refugees were killed and 120 wounded.
7. The entrance to the church of St. Mark belonging to the Syrian Orthodox received a mortar shell, killing a monk and wounding two other persons.
8. The Convent of St. George of the Greek Orthodox Church, which is contiguous to the Greek Catholic Cathedral received a mortar shell, causing considerable damage.
9. The Convent of St. John of the Greek Orthodox Church, contiguous to the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, was hit a mortar shell on its roof. St. Abraham Convent nearby was also hit as well as St. Spiridon Convent.
10. The Convent of the Archangel belonging to the Coptic Patriarchate, situated over the grotto of the Holy Cross, forming part of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre was struck by a mortar that damaged its roof.
11. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was hit by mortar shells, wounding many refugees sheltered therein.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://palestine.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=776>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter14\\_1of3.htm](http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com/EPP/Chapter14_1of3.htm)

12. The big Franciscan Convent (St. Saviour), situated near the Holy Sepulchre, received mortar shells, causing damage to the orphanage, general secretariat, and hitting nearby houses, killing and wounding children sheltered therein.
13. The Latin Patriarchate was struck mortar shells on several occasions, causing damage to the Patriarchal Palace, especially to the Cathedral.
14. The Greek Catholic Patriarchate was hit by mortar bombs on two occasions, damaging the building and wounding some persons.
15. The Church in the village of Birwe, east of Akka (Acre) was completely destroyed.
16. The Church of St. Saviour was destroyed and looted. The Church's valuable collection of church vestments was robbed.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <http://palestine.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=77> [http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com//Chapter14\\_1of3.htm#398\\_dado](http://www.palestine-encyclopedia.com//Chapter14_1of3.htm#398_dado)



## Current Reality

“Palestinian Christians are referred to as the Palestinian embroidery - an interwoven and an integral part of the whole population.”<sup>26</sup> Jean Zaru<sup>27</sup>

Palestinian Christians have, from the very beginning of the Palestinian struggle for independence, been at the forefront of national movements and have been among the most outspoken and prolific activists for the assertion of a unified and pluralistic Palestinian national identity.

Palestinian Christian representation in Palestinian government and other official bodies is demonstrably beyond being merely proportional. Palestinian Christians, despite dwindling numbers and increased rates of emigration enjoy broad representation in various state bodies, as well as high positions in leading businesses and their respective industries.

Recognizing the long-time leadership provided by Palestinian Christians, the Palestinian political system ensures that Palestinian Christians are duly represented in the Parliament (PLC). Six of 132 parliamentary seats are exclusively reserved for Palestinian Christians, giving Christians 4.5% representation even though their percentage of the population is less than that.

The Deputy Speaker of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s National Council (PNC), Qonstantin Qurmush, is a priest. Two Cabinet members and two members of the PLO’s Executive Committee, the highest decision-making body in the Palestinian political system, are Christians. President Mahmoud Abbas’ spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, is a Christian. Nine municipalities within the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including two of the country’s main cities, Ramallah and Bethlehem, stipulate that their council should have a Christian majority as well as a Christian mayor. Quotas for Christian and women’s representation are also enshrined in the National Authority’s Basic Law to ensure proper representation. Palestinian Christians also have a prominent role in Palestinian diplomacy. Currently, there are eight Ambassadors representing Palestine in capitals worldwide, including London, Berlin, Athens, Vatican City and others.

Palestinian Christians are also pioneers and entrepreneurs. There are many examples. The largest Palestinian-owned company, Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC), was founded by Hasib Sabbagh, a Palestinian Christian. CCC is also the largest construction company in the Middle East. Bassem Khoury, the owner of Dar Al-Shifa, Palestine’s first pharmaceutical company to export medicine produced in Palestine to Europe is also a Christian. The contribution and leadership of Palestinian Christians is also evident and indispensable in education and civil society.

Both Christmas and Easter are official holidays in Palestine. Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas attends Christmas mass every year, thrice, attending the Greek Orthodox, Catholic and Armenian Christmas services. St. George’s day in Palestine sees Muslims and

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<sup>26</sup> <http://palestine.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=77> Palestinian Christians: Facts, Figures, and Trends (2008): [http://www.annadwa.org/en/media/pdf/pal\\_chr\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.annadwa.org/en/media/pdf/pal_chr_booklet.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://palestine.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=77> Palestinian Quaker; founding member of Sabeel, an ecumenical Palestinian Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem.

Christians coming together in Al-Khader, near Bethlehem to commemorate St. George's martyrdom.

The political representation and active participation in society of Palestinian Christians is a source of pride for Palestine. It is part of the rich heritage that ensures the strength of society as the Palestinian people persevere in seeking their overdue freedom. However, this positive political and social circumstance does not detract from the current reality Palestinians, Christian and Muslim, endure under Israeli occupation.

## **I. Land Grab and Walls**

Since the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territory began in 1967, successive Israeli governments have financed and endorsed settlement activities inside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. International law regards these settlements as a grave violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers the construction of settlements by an occupying power inside territory it occupies to be a war crime.<sup>28</sup> At present, there are at least 200 illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. These settlements control and in effect expropriate 46% of the occupied West Bank.<sup>29</sup>

Since the year 2000, Israeli occupation authorities have added additional layers to the colonization exercised through settlement construction. It began constructing a Wall inside the West Bank separating Palestinian cities from one another while also de facto annexing more Palestinian land, including the creation of so-called buffer areas, no-go zones, and closing off entire Palestinian communities. On 4 July 2004, the International Court of Justice adopted an advisory ruling deeming the Wall and settlements illegal. It ruled that the Wall and settlement regime "severely impedes the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination, and is therefore a breach of Israel's obligation to respect that right".<sup>30</sup> The Court also ruled that it was the obligation of all states to ensure that the Palestinian right to self-determination is realized.

This fragmentation has a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians, whose land is confiscated to build and expand these settlements. In reality, the confiscation of land means the demolition of Palestinian homes built on land set for confiscation, the razing of planted fields and orchards, as well as the barring of Palestinian farmers from accessing their fields.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://palestine.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=77> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court <http://www.un.org/law/icc/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/New%20Publications/What%20is%20left%20of%20the%20two-state%20solution.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> ICJ 2004 Advisory Ruling <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/131/1671.pdf>

A 2011 study conducted by international experts on the quantifiable cost of the occupation, its system of control on movement of goods and people, as well as the Wall and settlement regime concluded:

“Given the total fiscal deficit in West Bank and Gaza of \$1.358 billion in 2010... the Palestinian economy would be able to run a healthy fiscal balance with a surplus of \$438 million without the direct and indirect fiscal costs imposed by the occupation.”<sup>31</sup>

## **II. Bethlehem and Jerusalem – Walled in and Separated**

Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, is part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is surrounded on three sides by the illegal wall, erected by Israel in contravention of international law.<sup>32</sup> The wall is an advanced form of land-grab, serving to expropriate as much additional Palestinian territory as possible for the benefit of the illegal settlement regime used by Israel to further entrench its occupation of Palestine. Bethlehem is surrounded on virtually all sides by illegal Israeli settlements; 22 in total built on land that pertains directly to the Bethlehem municipality’s area of jurisdiction.<sup>33</sup>

Israel’s wall, which in many areas is built at the doorstep of residents’ homes, surrounds the city on three sides and cuts almost directly through it, claiming in total about 4,000 dunoms (1 dunom equals 1000 square meters) of land pertaining to Bethlehem.<sup>34</sup> In 2009, a UN report confirmed that Israel’s expropriation of land as well as the expansion of the settlement and Wall regime in the Bethlehem district had shrunk Bethlehem to 13% of its original size.<sup>35</sup>

Residents of Beit Jala, for example, have lost over 70% of their land due to settlement expansion. More than half of Beit Jala’s olive trees, a primary source of livelihood for the people of the region, are located in the Cremisan valley, which is under threat of Israeli confiscation for the benefit of the expanding illegal settlements and the Wall. No less than 58 families will have lost their livelihood entirely if this planned expansion goes through.

Plans have been made by the Israeli establishment and settler movements to open a series of hotels on parts of the stolen land which were added to the already encroaching settlements of Gilo, Giv’at Hamatos and Har Homa. These hotels will be constructed on illegally confiscated Palestinian land in what are considered prime locations overlooking Bethlehem and surrounding areas, undoubtedly usurping business from the mainly Palestinian Christian business owners whose livelihoods

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.mne.gov.ps/pdf/economiccostsofoccupationforpalestine.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.un.int/wcm/webdav/site/palestine/shared/documents/advisoryopinion.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheet/Colonizing%20Christmas%20Facts%20on%20Israeli%20Occupation%20and%20Bethlehem.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheet/Colonizing%20Christmas%20Facts%20on%20Israeli%20Occupation%20and%20Bethlehem.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.ochaopt.org/results.aspx?id=3358>

depend on the numbers of tourists who visit the West Bank and use Palestinian services while visiting.

In addition to this and other breaches of international law, the basic right of free mobility is severely compromised, as is the case in the rest of the West Bank. This is ensured by the multilayered system of Israeli checkpoints, Israeli-only roads, as well as physical barriers on main traffic arteries in addition to military-run commercial crossings. These restrictions have a devastating economic cost and compound an already difficult situation for the struggling Palestinian businesses. It is difficult to quantify the direct and indirect cost of these restrictions. However, in 2011, experts conducted a study to provide conservative estimates on the cost of Israeli occupation to the Palestinian economy. They estimated that the direct costs of Israeli-imposed restriction during 2010 alone was around 185 million US dollars, equivalent to 2.3% of Palestine's GDP at the time.<sup>36</sup>

### **III. Freedom of Worship**

The current reality under occupation has direct consequences on the right to freedom of worship. Notably, the construction of settlements and the route of the Wall have altered and barred access to what is regarded as the historic Patriarch's Route. Traditionally, Christian pilgrims would retrace this route, which would allow them to visit sites and churches of historical and religious significance.

Under Israeli occupation, Palestinian freedom of worship is not a reality. Israel consistently bars Palestinians from practicing their fundamental right to freedom of worship and religious expression. For Palestinians, Christian and Muslim alike, the right to freely worship and celebrate their faiths in the Holy City of Jerusalem is not guaranteed by Israel. It is in fact severely restricted and repressed. Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim must apply for permits to enter Jerusalem, even during religious holidays like Easter and Christmas.

The reality underlying the absence of free access to religious sites and festivities is of a purely political nature. Israeli policies in occupied East Jerusalem are aimed at altering the demographic and cultural identity of the City. A US State Department report on international religious freedom affirmed, "Many of the national and municipal policies in Jerusalem were designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem."<sup>37</sup> This policy reflects itself in many aspects, especially in restrictions on freedom of worship.

Israeli restrictions on freedom of worship are not a new phenomenon, but the practice has only intensified in the last few years. Israeli authorities erect barriers and

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/qpal/docs/2012Cairo/p2%20jad%20isaac%20e.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2009/127349.htm>

police checkpoints around the Old City of Jerusalem during Christian holidays in attempt to stem the flow of worshippers. On Palm Sunday in 2014, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal declared:

“Our congregations, our sons and daughters were not with me on Palm Sunday. This was due to limited permits, no permits; and delayed permits received just a few hours before the procession on Sunday. Many busloads, from the different West Bank cities and villages were ready to come but were turned down because the Israeli authorities did not grant them military permits to access Jerusalem for worship. Our faithful also include Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. They too, want very much to be here”.<sup>38</sup>

Often during Christian holidays, especially Holy Week, a large section of the Old City is blocked off by barriers that seal off the upper section of the Via Dolorosa and the Christian quarter.<sup>39</sup> On many occasions, pilgrims are denied access to their holy sites, beaten and arrested.

The international community recognizes these punitive restrictions. In 2012, the United States State Department stated:

“Strict closures and curfews imposed by the Israeli government negatively affected residents' ability to practice their religion at holy sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, as well as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.”<sup>40</sup> Arab Christians from all corners of the Middle East also face immense difficulties accessing Jerusalem and its holy sites.<sup>41</sup>

The wall Israel is building illegally in the occupied West Bank also significantly impedes freedom of worship. Bethlehem and Jerusalem, traditionally cities that are connected are now separated by the Wall and several Israeli military checkpoints that prohibit entry of Palestinians not carrying special permits. This also affects the flow of tourists and pilgrims who wish to reach the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and those who wish to visit Christian sites in Bethany and Bethlehem.

#### **IV. The Siege on the Gaza Strip**

Gaza is home to one of the oldest churches in the Holy Land. Situated in the center of Gaza's Old City, the Church of Saint Porphyrius is named after the 5th century

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<sup>38</sup> <http://pief.oikoumene.org/en/news-events/news/PatriarchTwallaments.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/20/palestinian-christians-pilgrims-via-dolorosa-jersualem>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192889.htm>

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheets/FACTSHEET\\_Easter\\_2014.pdf](http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheets/FACTSHEET_Easter_2014.pdf)

bishop of Gaza, Saint Porphyrius, whose tomb is situated in the northeastern corner of the church. Gaza also has a Catholic and a Baptist Church.

The Israeli siege imposed on Gaza affects its entire population of 1.6 million, Muslims and Christians. The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as the repeated military assaults on the strip, have driven thousands of Palestinians outside the territory seeking better opportunities and safety. This is also true to Gaza's dwindling Christian community, who face particularly insurmountable obstacles as their access to holy sites around the West Bank, including Bethlehem and Jerusalem, is severely curtailed. Save for minimal exceptions, Israel does not allow Gazans between the ages of 16 and 35 to even apply for permits. Even those who are able to apply, and less in number still those granted permits, face humiliation and harassment at the hands of Israeli soldiers at numerous checkpoints and militarily controlled points of access.

## **V. Hate Crimes and Terrorism**

Hate crimes by Israeli extremists against Palestinians and Palestinian Israelis, or so-called 'price tag' attacks, are on the rise. Between 2007 and 2011, Israeli settler violence against Palestinians, including against Christian and Muslim holy sites, rose by a staggering 315%.<sup>42</sup> The attacks continue to increase in numbers and ferocity. In the first three months of 2014, so-called 'price-tag' attacks rose by 200%.<sup>43</sup>

Since the beginning of 2014, 'price-tag' attacks specifically targeting Palestinian Christians and Churches have risen steeply. Attacks inside Israel targeted the Palestinian Christian village of Jish, the Church Tabgha on the Sea of the Galilee, and Nazareth among others. Meanwhile in occupied East Jerusalem, attacks and hate graffiti have been prolific. Graffiti with insults targeting Jesus and Mary as well as Christianity in general were sprayed on Church walls repeatedly.

"The Christian community feels increasingly threatened. We see that Israel is going further and further to the right. It does not matter whether you are Muslim or Christian, in these people's eyes we are the enemy" Samuel Barhoum, the Episcopalian archdeacon of Jerusalem, told the press in May 2014.<sup>44</sup>

On several occasions, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem condemned the "wave of fanaticism and intimidation against Christians" and lamented that there was "no gesture of solidarity and condemnation...from the Israeli political side"<sup>45</sup> Leaders of the Orthodox<sup>46</sup> and Lutheran<sup>47</sup> Churches, among others, have also condemned these hate crimes.

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<sup>42</sup> 'When Settlers Attack': <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/32678>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/11421-settler-attacks-against-palestinian-property-up-200>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/anti-palestinian-arson-attacks-rise-20144306116355863.html>

<sup>45</sup> <http://forward.com/articles/197841/catholics-condemn-israeli-politicians-for-silence/#ixzz31hCwPVFo>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.obethlehem.com/about-bethlehem/news/32-news/sept13/136-another-price-tag-attack-targets-christian-monastery-near-jerusalem>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.elcjl.org/tag/bishop-munib-younan/>

These hate crimes also go largely unpunished. This lack of accountability and sharp increase in attacks has drawn Palestinian and worldwide condemnation. In its 2013 Report on Terrorism, the US State Department referred to these attacks as terrorist, noting, “Attacks by extremist Israeli settlers against Palestinian residents, property, and places of worship in the West Bank continued and were largely unprosecuted”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> <http://mondoweiss.net/2014/05/settler-attacks-terror.html>

## **Current Struggles**

### **I. Institutional Discrimination**

Human rights organizations have long documented and petitioned against several Israeli laws that discriminate based on nationality and/or religion. According to Adalah, Israel has at least 50 discriminatory laws directed against Palestinians and Palestinian Israelis, Muslim and Christian.<sup>49</sup> This directly impacts the living conditions of Palestinian Christians and contributes to the current burdens they endure.

Some of these laws<sup>50</sup> are:

#### **Civil Wrongs Law - Amendment No. 8 (Liability of the State)**

The law widely exempts Israel from its liability for injuries and damages inflicted on Palestinian Israelis present in the Occupied Palestinian Territory or Palestinians from the Territory, by the Israeli military.

#### **Protection of Holy Sites Law of 1967**

Empowers the Ministry of Religious Affairs to designate the names of the holy sites in Israel. To date, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has declared 135 Jewish sites as holy sites and has not declared any Muslim, Christian, or Druze holy places as recognized holy sites.

#### **Citizenship Law of 1952**

Article 2(a) of the Citizenship Law stipulates that, “Every emigrant under the Law of Return will become a citizen of Israel as a direct result of the return.” Article 3 of the law also deprives Palestinians who were residents of Palestine prior to 1948 of the right to gain citizenship or residence status in Israel based on conditions designed to deprive the Palestinian refugees of the Right to Return.

A proposed amendment to the Citizenship Law requires all persons seeking to naturalize via the naturalization process and Israeli citizens applying for their first ID cards (obligatory at the age of 16) to declare a loyalty oath to Israel as a “Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state, to its symbols and values, and to serve the state in any way demanded, through military service or alternative service, as defined by law.” It would replace the text of the current declaration: “I declare that I will be a loyal citizen of the State of Israel.”

Requiring such an oath marginalizes the status of Palestinian Israelis, who comprise 20% of the population, as it deems Israel a state for Jews only.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://adalah.org/eng/Israeli-Discriminatory-Law-Database>

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.adalah.org/eng/?mod=db&dld\\_page=law&slg=religious-jewish-services-law](http://www.adalah.org/eng/?mod=db&dld_page=law&slg=religious-jewish-services-law)



## **The Citizenship Law<sup>51</sup> (initially passed as a temporary provision in 2003)**

The law restricts the eligibility of Palestinian spouses of Israeli citizens to gain citizenship, or spouses of Palestinian Jerusalemites to gain residency permits. This restriction also extends to all Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza who seek entry for their spouses from abroad.

Despite being a temporary order, the law has been renewed annually since its adoption. Various human rights organizations have challenged this law, to no avail. The Israeli Supreme Court upheld the law in a May 2006 decision. Most recently, in January 2012, the Supreme Court rejected a petition in a 6-5 decision, further entrenching the controversial law. In their ruling, the majority of judges ruled that even if the law harmed constitutional rights such as the right to equality, they viewed the infringement as “proportional”.<sup>52</sup>

## **II. Israeli Attempts to Disconnect Palestinian Christian from their Society**

On 24 February 2014, the Israeli parliament (Knesset) passed a bill, which sets Palestinian Christians apart from Palestinians of other faiths, specifically Muslim Palestinians. The bill was sponsored by Yariv Levin, a member of the Israeli Prime Minister’s Likud party. It even went so far as to falsely assert that Palestinian Christians are simply not Arabs. The bill passed two months after Christian and Muslim Palestinian Israelis were given separate representation on a national employment commission; a move also rejected by Palestinian Israelis.

Celebrating the passing of the legislation, Levin declared, “It’s a historic and important step that could balance the State of Israel and connect us to the Christians, and I am careful not to refer to them as Arabs, because they are not Arabs”.<sup>53</sup>

The bill is a sectarian and racially discriminatory law, indicative of and supplemental to a discriminatory trend in Israeli legislation. It is also a clear attempt at dividing Palestinian society. Strikingly obvious is the inherent racism and sectarian thinking that led to this decision. It also reflects the Israeli establishment’s denial of the Palestinian Nakba, or Catastrophe, of 1948 during which the majority of the Palestinian people were forcibly exiled from their homeland, including the majority of Palestinian Christians.

"The measure was to be expected following the campaign by the Israeli right to divide Christians from their own people by encouraging them to think that they are not

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<sup>51</sup>[http://www.mossawacenter.org/my\\_documents/publication2/2012%20Citizenship%20and%20Entry%20into%20Israel%20Law.pdf](http://www.mossawacenter.org/my_documents/publication2/2012%20Citizenship%20and%20Entry%20into%20Israel%20Law.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/supreme-court-upholds-ban-on-palestinians-living-with-israeli-spouses-1.406812>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=676060>

Arabs," said Bassel Ghattas, a member of Israeli parliament for the communist Hadash party.<sup>54</sup>

Recently the Israeli government announced and put into motion plans to distribute military enlistment papers to Palestinian Christian homes in an attempt to encourage Palestinian Christians to join the Israeli army.

Like similar measures adopted before, the bill has been met with widespread condemnation, from Palestinian Christians, Church leaders, and Palestinian society at large. Kairos Palestine, an inter-denominational initiative for peace condemned the move. "Those who call for recruiting Christians to the occupation army do not represent us, do not represent our Churches, and do not represent the Christians", Kairos said in a statement.

Religious and other leaders within the Palestinian-Israeli Christian community have called on people to ignore and condemn such measures. Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Holy Land and Jordan of the Orthodox Church issued a statement expressing his "categorical rejection of calls for the recruitment of Christians into the Israeli army"<sup>55</sup>. The Patriarch also stripped Father Gabriel Naddav of all his responsibilities and relieved him from his responsibilities as a priest at the Church of Yaffa-Nazareth or other Churches of the Patriarchate due to his calls on Palestinian Christians to enlist in the Israeli occupation army.

For their part, the heads of Jerusalem churches expressed condemnation of the Israeli measures to enlist Christian Palestinian Israelis. They also rejected the premise of the Israeli legislation that treats Palestinian-Israeli Christians based on their religion, rather than national identity, stressing that Christianity was a religion not an ethnic or national identity.<sup>56</sup> PLO Executive Committee, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, also condemned the bill, accusing Israel of attempting to transform the ongoing occupation into "an outright religious confrontation"<sup>57</sup>.

Palestinian Christians reject the Israeli claim that they are not Arabs, a claim belied by centuries of cultural heritage and teaching, as well as being a clear and inarguably malevolent attempt at further dividing and conquering the naturally pluralistic Palestinian society. Comparisons have been drawn between this new measure and South African laws dating back to Apartheid, which separated groups of black citizens into separate tribal groups.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/israel-send-call-papers-christian-arabs-183044765.html>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.orthodoxinitiative.org/#!His-Beatitude-Theophilos-III-rejects-new-Israeli-law/c1kr5/C3F52494-3FB8-44C4-9E7F-C9192D94C4A4>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/11450-church-leaders-in-jerusalem-refuse-israeli-discrimination-against-christians-and-muslims#sthash.tNeJkseT.dpuf>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=676060>

## **Palestinian Christians and national struggle for freedom 1967 - Present**

### **I. Introduction:**

In June 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in addition to Egypt's Sinai desert and the Syrian Golan Heights. The military occupation of the Palestinian Territory (OPT) caused a second wave of dispossession and displacement of Palestinians. Records show that between 400,000 and 450,000 or approximately one third of the Palestinian population of the OPT at the time were displaced. Half of those displaced in 1967 (193,500) were refugees of 1948.

As was the case in 1948, the occupation also took its toll on Christian holy sites. On 26 August 1967, Rawhi Al-Khatib, the deposed Palestinian mayor of Jerusalem, wrote a memorandum on the measures taken by Israel in occupied Jerusalem. He decried several acts of infringement and attacks on Muslim and Christian holy sites. Al-Khatib added, "The failure of the occupation authorities to prevent desecration of holy places led to the burglary of one of the largest and holiest churches in the world. The priceless diamond-studded crown of the statue of the Virgin, our lady of sorrows on Calvary itself was stolen."<sup>58</sup> In addition to holy sites in Jerusalem, other holy sites, including the Church of the Nativity were also damaged across the occupied West Bank.

The occupation also dealt a serious blow to the sustainability of Palestinian life in occupied East Jerusalem, particularly regarding Palestinian Christians. Israeli occupation authorities afforded Palestinian Jerusalemites the status of residents in Jerusalem and conditioned this permit of residence on continuous physical presence in the City. This meant that Palestinian Jerusalemites were confined to the city as well as the diminishing economic opportunities available due to the restrictions on movement, construction and other activities, imposed by the occupation.

Another aspect of Israel's military occupation is deportation and banning Palestinians working or studying abroad from returning. Approximately 80,000 Palestinians who left the occupied Palestinian Territory for work or study after the occupation of 1967 were barred from returning home. Additionally, between 1967 and 1993, Israel expelled thousands of Palestinians; at least 1,300 of them have yet to return.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.palestine-studies.org/files/pdf/jps/9704.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.badil.org/fr/article74/item/664-palestinians-displaced-as-a-result-of-the-1967-war>

## **II. Some Prominent Palestinian Christians in the National Movement for Independence (1948 – Present)**

### **Edward Said (1935 – 2003)**

A celebrated Palestinian-American academic, public intellectual, political activist, literary theorist and critic, Edward Said is widely considered one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century.

Edward Wadie Said was born in Jerusalem in 1935 to a Christian family who immigrated to the United States in 1947. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Princeton University in 1957, a Master of Arts degree in 1960 and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in English Literature (1964) from Harvard University. Said held the position of professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University in New York.

Best known for his book *Orientalism* (1979), Said redefined the term to signify the Western study of Eastern cultures and pointed out the inherently colonialist prism through which the discipline itself was often taught, addressing the theme extensively throughout his career by way of vigorous debate and public discussion. *Orientalism* was translated into more than two dozen languages. Said's work in *Orientalism* is recognized to have played a major role in transforming the academic discourse in the field of Middle Eastern studies.

Edward Said was among the most outspoken proponents for the establishment of a Palestinian state, spoke for the rights of Palestinians within Israel and the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and demanded increased US political pressure upon Israel to recognize, grant and respect these rights. In 1977, Said became a member of the Palestine National Council, the Palestine Liberation Organization's parliament in exile.

Edward Wadie Said died of leukemia in September 2003, in New York.

### **Dr. Hanan Ashrawi (Born October 1946)**

Born in Nablus in 1946, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi is a Palestinian legislator, activist and scholar, a protégé and colleague of the late Edward Said. In addition to her academic background, Dr. Ashrawi has been among the most prominent figures in the Palestinian leadership since the 1980's. She was a member of the Palestinian delegation to the

Madrid peace conference in 1991 and became the spokesperson of the Palestinian negotiations team until 1993.

She holds both a bachelor's and master's degrees in literature obtained from the Department of English at the American University of Beirut as well as a Ph.D. in Medieval and Comparative Literature from the University of Virginia.

Dr. Ashrawi holds the distinction of being the first woman elected to the PLO's Palestinian National Council. After the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, she ran two successful campaigns for a seat in the Palestinian Legislative Council representing Jerusalem. Dr. Ashrawi was also the PNA's first Minister of Education. In 2009, Dr. Ashrawi was elected to the Executive Committee of the PLO, the highest decision-making body in the Palestinian political system. She now heads the Department of Culture and Information in the Palestine Liberation Organization.

In addition in 1998 Dr. Ashrawi founded *MIFTAH*, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, an initiative geared towards raising awareness and discussion of Palestinian human rights, democracy, and peace. In 2006. She founded Transparency Palestine, an organization dedicated to ensuring transparency and accountability.

Dr. Ashrawi serves on the Advisory board of the World Bank (MENA), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the International Human Rights Council among others. She has received several international awards for her work.

### **Kamal Naser (1924 – 1973)**

Born into a prominent Christian family from Birzeit near Ramallah, Kamal Nasser was an activist against the partition of Palestine and British occupation since his teenage years. In 1969, he became member of the first Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the highest decision-making body in the Palestinian system. He was a member of the Fatah movement's Central Committee. Nasser founded the PLO's Media and Information Department as well as its magazine, "Falastin Al-Thawra" (Palestine the Revolution), which was the voice of the Palestinian national liberation movement.

A writer and poet known for his philosophical thinking, Nasser was an ardent proponent of Palestinian rights. In Palestinian circles, he was known as the "conscience", reference to his depth of thought and sincerity. In April 1973, Israeli undercover commandos assassinated Nasser along with two other prominent Palestinian leaders in their homes in Beirut.

### **Munib Younan** (Born in 1950)

A native Jerusalemite, Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib Younan was consecrated as bishop of Palestine and Jordan in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land in 1998. Since 2010, Rt. Rev. Dr. Younan was elected president of the Lutheran World Federation, which joins 145 member churches in 79 countries representing 70 million Christians worldwide.

He is the author of *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and in the World* (2003), presenting the historical and social context of the Palestinian issue and chronicling the story of Arab Christianity. He is the recipient of several awards for his efforts towards hosting and spreading interfaith dialogue and pacific calls for justice in Palestine, including the *Human Rights Award* from the United Nations Association.

Bishop Younan co-authored the Palestine Kairos Document, which presented the unanimous position of 15 senior inter-denominational Christian leaders in Palestine. It was styled after the South Africa Kairos document drafted by South African Christians in 1985 to call on Churches to side with the oppressed against the apartheid regime. Kairos Palestine has played a significant role in raising international awareness regarding the plight of the Palestinian people for freedom and self-determination.

### **Khalil Al-Sakakini** (1878 - 1953)

Among the most famed figures in modern Palestinian history, Khalil Al-Sakakini was a Jerusalem-born Palestinian educator, scholar and poet as well as an Arab nationalist. He founded the *Dusturiyyah* School in 1908, an institution characterized by its Arab nationalist approach. In addition, he pioneered a system of education known for its progressiveness even by today's standards which featured a strategic omission of grades, prizes and punishments while focusing on music education and athletics, all the while shifting the primary language of teaching from Turkish to Arabic. Al-Sakakini is remembered for his prolific writing and humanism, as well as for being one of the foremost advocates of pan-Arabism and proliferators of progressive educational philosophies and curriculums.

### **Afif Safieh** (Born in 1950)

Afif Safieh is a Jerusalem-born Palestinian career diplomat and published writer. Currently, Dr. Safieh is a roving Ambassador for Special Missions based in London and

is an elected member to the Fatah movement's Revolutionary Council, the organization's decision-making body. Before that, he served as Palestine's Ambassador to the Netherlands, Britain, Holy See, Russian Federation, and the United States.

Safieh was active in the national movement for Palestinian freedom while completing university studies in Belgium and France. From 1969 to 1971, he was elected President of the General Union of Palestinian Students in Belgium and between 1974 and 1975, he was the President of the Union in France. In 1976, he was appointed deputy director of the PLO Observer Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva. He also served as staff member in charge of European Affairs and UN institutions at the late Yasser Arafat's Beirut office. Meanwhile, Safieh also pursued his interests in academia and research, holding a research post at the Center for European Studies in the Catholic University of Louvain, as well as being a visiting scholar at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University (1985-1987).

#### **Claudette Habash** (Born in 1936)

Born in Jerusalem, Ms. Habash is a Palestinian refugee whose home in West Jerusalem still stands. She holds a BA in Psychology and Education from the AUB (1958) and a PhD in Education from Bradford University, UK. Her long career in education, social and humanitarian issues is nothing short of inspiring. In 1960, Habash began her career as an instructor at the UNRWA Men's Teacher Training Center.

In 1971, Ms. Habash became the Chairperson of the YWCA Women's Council then became National Board Member from 1978 to 1984 and finally as president from 1989 to 1993. Habash also established herself as a pioneer in social work and activism in Palestine, founding and supporting several organizations, including the Arab Thought Forum in Jerusalem (1976), the Arab Studies Society (1979). Since 1979, Habash served as Deputy Chair of the National Mental Health Society since 1982.

Member of several councils and delegations of the Holy See; member of Pontificum Consilium - Cor Unum from 1990-94 and again from 1995-99. Also was Chairperson of Central Committee of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees from 2001 – 2004. Became an Ambassador for Peace for the Inter-Religious and International Federation for World Peace in 2003; received the International Voluntary Service Award from the Catholic University of San Antonio, Murcia, Spain, in 2004. In 2010, Habash was elevated to the rank of Commander in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

**Rifat Odeh Kassis (Born in 1958)**

A native of Beit Sahour, Kassis has long been a prominent figure in the non-violent resistance movement against the Israeli occupation, campaigning throughout his career for the effective application of international human rights and international humanitarian law in Palestine. For those activities, he was detained several times by Israeli occupation authorities.

In 1992, he founded the first Palestinian independent Child Rights' NGO- a national section of the Geneva-based global child rights' movement, Defence for Children International (DCI). In 2005 and again 2008, he was elected President of the DCI movement at the global level.

Mr. Kassis's dedication to international law and human rights extended beyond the borders of Palestine, including helping establish a rehabilitation program for the Chechen children affected by the war in Chechnya in 1995.

During his term as Executive Director of the East Jerusalem YMCA (2000-2004), he initiated and spearheaded the YMCA/YWCA Joint Advocacy Initiative, from which the highly successful Olive Tree Campaign was launched. From September 2007 to March 2009, Kassis was the Special Advisor on the Middle East for the World Council of Churches Secretary General (WCC). He is also the co-founder of the Alternative Tourism Group in Palestine, a group dedicated to informed and ethical tourism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Mr. Kassis also helped co-author the Kairos Palestine document, published by 15 prominent inter-denominational Palestinian Christian leaders and presenting Palestine's Christian message about the Palestinian people's plight for freedom and justice.

**Ghassan Andoni (Born in 1956)**

A native of Beit Sahour, a town near Bethlehem, Ghassan Andoni is a physics professor at Birzeit University and peace activist. He is best known for co-founding the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People.

In the 1980's, Israel imprisoned Andoni on suspicion of being a member of the PLO upon his return from Lebanon, where he was working in refugee camps during the Civil War. Andoni also actively participated in the tax resistance movement in Beit Sahour during the late 1980's, during which Palestinians refused to pay taxes to the occupation as a way of resisting it.



In 2000, Andoni co-founded the International Solidarity Movement, coordinating international volunteers with Palestinians and Israelis in non-violent actions that brought to attention the results of years of oppression at the hands of Israeli military occupation. In 2006, the American Friends Service Committee nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Jeff Halper, an Israeli professor and peace activist who co-founded the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICAHD) in 1997.

### **Michel Sabbah (Born in 1933)**

Born in Nazareth to a Palestinian Christian family, Michel Sabbah held the position of Archbishop and Latin Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem between 1987 and 2008, making him the first native Palestinian to hold the office in many centuries. Having been ordained a priest for the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1955, he pursued Arabic language and Literature studies at St. Joseph University in Beirut, ultimately going on to serve as the Latin Patriarchate's Director of Schools until the 1967 War. He went on to teach Arabic and Islamic studies in Djibouti until 1973, when he began pursuing a doctorate in Arabic philology at the Sorbonne in Paris, France. He became President of Bethlehem University in 1980.

Sabah is an outspoken critic of the illegal Israeli occupation and a prolific voice in the quest for justice and peace in Palestine and the region. He is one of the co-authors, along with several prominent Palestinian Christian leaders, of the Kairos Palestine document, launched on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, 2009. Currently, he is the Grand Prior of the chivalric Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, one of the knightly orders founded in 1099.

### **Elias Chacour (Born in 1939)**

Chacour was born in the town of Kufor Bir'em, a village destroyed by the Israeli military in 1952. He served as Archbishop of Acre, Nazareth, Haifa and the Galilee for the Melkite Greek Catholic Church from 2006 to 2014. He is known as a prominent voice who has called for reconciliation between Arabs and Israelis, having written a book about the experience of Palestinian Israelis and advocates for the rights of displaced Palestinian Israeli refugees like those from Kufor Bir'em to return to their villages. He is responsible for the founding of the Mar Elias Educational Institutions and is the vice president of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. He is an avid advocate of non-violence and an accomplished author.

### **George Habash (1926 –2008)**

Born in Lydd to a family of Greek Orthodox merchants, Habash and his family were expelled in 1948 during the Nakba. He co-founded the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in 1952, a movement that advocated pan-Arabism and championed the cause of Palestinian freedom. He went on to play a key role in the founding of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1967. After a lifetime of vehement opposition to any concessions to the Israeli occupation, George Habash passed away in Amman, Jordan in 2008.

### **Said Khoury (Born in 1923)**

Said Khoury is a prominent Palestinian Christian businessman, born in Safad in 1923. After studying civil engineering at the University of Beirut, Khoury returned to Safad in 1946 to set up a construction company while his cousin Hasib Sabbagh established a company of his own in Haifa. In 1948, the Sabbagh and Khoury families were forcibly expelled from their homes and fled to Lebanon. There, the two cousins founded the Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC). The company is now the largest construction in the Middle East. Said Khoury is one of the most successful Arab businessmen in the world. He continues to support Palestinian professionals and universities through donations, investments, and training programs.

### **Gabi Baramki (1930 - 2012)**

A highly respected Palestinian intellectual, Gabi Baramki served as vice president and acting President of Birzeit University, responsible for the development of the university's very first degree-granting program in 1972. He was the co-founder of the Palestinian European Academic Cooperation in Education Program as well as the Palestinian Council for Higher Education. He was an avid spokesperson for Palestinians' right to proper and high-quality education despite the occupation. Israel imprisoned Baramki for his efforts to maintain the academic independence of Palestinian educational institutions and leading protests against the closure of Birzeit University by the Israeli army in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

Born in Jerusalem and exiled to Gaza in during the Nakba in 1948, Baramki spent his entire life waging court battles alongside his father to secure his family's right to return to their home, to no avail. In 2009, he published "Peaceful Resistance: Building a Palestinian University Under Occupation." He is remembered for his tireless efforts in

resisting the Israeli occupation and his struggle to ensure Palestinians' access to quality education and intellectual freedom.

### **III. Role of the Church in the Palestinian Struggle for Freedom**

Church leaders and prominent Palestinians have been an indivisible part of the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom. Examples abound throughout modern Palestinian history. This is an attempt to explore two of the most recent initiatives that have had far-reaching impact.

#### **KAIROS**

"Love is seeing the face of God in every human being. Every person is my brother or my sister. However, seeing the face of God in everyone does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather, this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression.

The aggression against the Palestinian people which is the Israeli occupation, is an evil that must be resisted. It is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed.

Primary responsibility for this rests with the Palestinians themselves suffering occupation.

Christian love invites us to resist it. However, love puts an end to evil by walking in the ways of justice. Responsibility lies also with the international community, because international law regulates relations between peoples today. Finally responsibility lies with the perpetrators of the injustice; they must liberate themselves from the evil that is in them and the injustice they have imposed on others." *Kairos Palestine 2009*<sup>60</sup>

In 2009, 15 senior inter-denominational Palestinian Christian leaders launched Kairos Palestine. It was styled after the South Africa Kairos document drafted by South African Christians in 1985 to call on Churches to side with the oppressed against the apartheid regime. Kairos is a message of peace, decrying the use of God's name to commit acts of oppression and brutality and the subjugation of peoples. It rejects the advancement of geopolitical causes using God's name as abhorrent and unacceptable from a theological as well as humanistic standpoint.

This document is a comprehensive analysis of the oppressive and humiliating reality of occupation, and the spiritual response it fosters from deep inside the authors' hearts. It outlines the role of the church in fostering dialogue and resisting occupation as well as the importance of the parallels between Christian ideals and the struggle for justice in the Holy Land. Written with a spirit of oneness, Kairos addresses the Israeli occupation of Palestine as illegal and immoral repression of a pluralistic and diverse society, more united by commonalities than it is divided by differences.

Kairos Palestine has played a significant role in raising international awareness regarding the plight of the Palestinian people for freedom and self-determination. The

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf>

outreach of Kairos Palestine has resulted in increasing solidarity and lobbying for Palestinian rights by Churches and human rights organizations worldwide.

### **Christ At the Checkpoint<sup>61</sup>**

An initiative championed by the Bethlehem Bible College in partnership with the Holy Land Trust, this Conference has been organized since 2010 with the stated goal of challenging “Evangelicals to take responsibility to help resolve the conflicts in Israel-Palestine”. In addition, Conference organizers seek to empower and encourage the Palestinian church role in achieving peace, discussing the realities of the injustices in Palestine and creating a platform of engagement with Christian Zionism.

The Conference’s manifesto recognizes:

“There are real injustices taking place in the Palestinian territories and the suffering of the Palestinian people can no longer be ignored. Any solution must respect the equity and rights of Israel and Palestinian communities; For Palestinian Christians, the occupation is the core of the conflict; Any challenge of the injustices taking place in the Holy Land must be done in Christian love. Criticism of Israel and the occupation cannot be confused with anti-Semitism and the delegitimization of the State of Israel”

The first conference hosted over 250 participants representing twenty countries. At its conclusion, participants adopted “The Bethlehem Evangelical Affirmation”, which proclaimed:

“We commit to reconnect with the local Palestinian church and to listen and learn from all those who follow Jesus in the Holy Land and to share their stories with our faith communities. We further commit to work together to advocate changes in public policy and so achieve a just and lasting resolution of the conflict.”

The statement, subsequent conferences, and engagement with evangelicals worldwide has greatly contributed to changing perceptions and breaking stereotypes of an influential group previously regarded as hostile to Palestinians and their rights.

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/>

# Flight of Palestinian Christians from the Holy Land

## I. Introduction

The majority of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank live between occupied East Jerusalem and the Bethlehem District. East Jerusalem and adjacent areas have long been subject to illegal expropriations and a sustained policy of changing the cultural, demographic, and political identity of the City, employing practices including the demolition of Palestinian homes, denial of construction permits, and expropriation of homes. These occupation policies affect both Christian and Muslim Palestinians alike.

However the Christian population, being a minority within Palestinian society are extremely hard-hit. The exodus or emigration of even one Christian family constitutes a significant demographic loss considering their already dwindling numbers within the remainder of historical Palestine.

The Israeli assertion that Palestinian Christians have been fleeing the Occupied Palestinian Territory due to religious intolerance or persecution is demonstrably false and intentionally misleading. It is designed to vilify Palestinians and Palestinian society at large and intended to detract from the international understanding and solidarity needed to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Harassment by the Israeli military, sparse job opportunities, dire economic conditions, closures and the illegal wall regime which prevent access between population centers and separate many families from their land and livelihoods are a few of the main reasons for emigration.<sup>62</sup> All of these are directly related to the illegal Israeli occupation. They are also the principal reasons behind most Christian Palestinian emigration.

DIYAR, a consortium of Lutheran-based, ecumenically-oriented institutions in Palestine, conducted a study on attitudes of Palestinian Christians, including their reasons for emigration. The study concluded that most of those who choose to emigrate amongst the Christians of Palestine are mainly aggravated by the lack of freedom and security, a direct result of the illegal Israeli occupation, endured by all Palestinians since 1967. The second main concern was shown to be the deteriorating economic situation in Palestine, also directly attributable to Israeli occupation. On the scale of main causes of emigration, the aforementioned reasons are followed directly (in order) by political instability in the region and the pursuit of education abroad.<sup>63</sup> Other reasons included family reunification and finding a spouse.

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<sup>62</sup> [http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal\\_christian\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal_christian_booklet.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal\\_christian\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.diyar.ps/media/documents/pal_christian_booklet.pdf)

## II. Restriction on Palestinian Tourism Sector

Tourism is extremely important for the Palestinian economy. Palestine's rich cultural heritage bears great significance for people from all over the world, for a variety of reasons and in many different ways. It's rich history and religious significance makes Palestine an important destination to the faithful, the curious, and the scholars. This is especially true for Christian pilgrims who come to Palestine for a journey that retraces the footsteps of Jesus and his disciples. This journey should take pilgrims to several important places, including the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and its many holy sites, the small village of Burqin near Jenin, where Jesus is believed to have performed his miracle of curing the lepers, and Jericho and its magnificent ancient sites dating back 10,000 years.

However, the reality of Israeli occupation that Palestine has endured since 1967 has had a direct and restrictive effect on the tourism industry. With little exception, most of the sites of interest to Christian pilgrims are located in the occupied West Bank. Yet, 97% of tourism income goes to Israel.<sup>64</sup>

For example, the Palestinian tourism sector is barred from exploring the limitless potential of Dead Sea tourism, which is located in the occupied territory of Palestine. Recent studies indicate that lifting restriction on the Dead Sea alone could contribute \$140 million USD annually to the fledgling Palestinian economy.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, movement restrictions imposed on Palestinians, including limited access to Jerusalem, make it difficult to organize tours within the occupied West Bank, while visiting Gaza has become impossible due to the Israeli siege. These movement restrictions alone are estimated to have cost the Palestinian economy almost 185 million USD in 2010 alone.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these limitations, the tourism sector's contribution to Palestinian GDP is estimated at 14%.<sup>67</sup> In the first half of 2013, approximately 2.6 million people visited tourist sites in the West Bank, over a third of them are Palestinians.<sup>68</sup> The sector also continues to develop its services and infrastructure, increasing the number of hotels and diversifying services.

Apart from a sustained Israeli policy of discouraging tourists from visiting Palestinian destinations, citing as reasons security threats and general instability, Israel retains an undeniable monopoly over the tourism industry in the Holy Land through different mechanisms.

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<sup>64</sup> Faith Under Occupation: <http://eappi.org/resources/eappi-publications.html>

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.ldf.ps/documentsShow.aspx?ATT\\_ID=6934](http://www.ldf.ps/documentsShow.aspx?ATT_ID=6934)

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.mne.gov.ps/pdf/EconomiccostsofoccupationforPalestine.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.iccpalestine.com/resources/file/publications/WTO%20&%20the%20Palestinian%20Tourism%20Sector.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=912&mid=3172&wversion=Staging>

Of the total 42 permits issued to Palestinian tour guides in 2005, only 25 are still (as of 2013) in use.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, there are 8,000 Israeli tour guides with valid permits.<sup>7</sup> In 2010, a bill was introduced in the Israeli parliament (Knesset) calling for the revocation of licenses granted to Palestinian tour guides from East Jerusalem on the grounds that they do not present the Israeli narrative.<sup>71</sup>

Israeli tour agencies retain full and exclusive rights to tour archeological and historical sites throughout the occupied West Bank. Unlike their Israeli counterparts, there are no mechanisms set up to guarantee that Palestinian tour agencies will be able to facilitate any tourist's entry into the country, whereas Israeli companies have the access and facilitation needed from Israeli authorities to obtain visas and passes for their customers. As such, that the vast majority of tour guides are Israeli and the story they tell caters exclusively to a narrative that omits the existence of Palestine and its cultural heritage while denying tourists and pilgrims the opportunity to fully explore Palestine and its rich history. This monopoly over narrative and access also translates into economic losses for Palestinian tourist operators.

The majority of Palestinian businesses in the tourism sector are small and medium-sized businesses. As such, difficulties and restrictions have a direct and harsh impact on their viability. This is especially true in Bethlehem, where thousands of Palestinians, Christian and Muslim, struggle to keep their businesses afloat due to the small portion of tourists who stay overnight in the city or buy souvenirs from its many shops.

The growth of the tourism sector is essential to the Palestinian economy's viability. But the challenges remain great and the unexplored potential of this sector continues to be a needless loss for the Palestinian economy, which could be generating thousands of urgently needed jobs.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.atg.ps/resources/file/pages/Economic%20Disparity%20in%20Israel.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.atg.ps/resources/file/pages/Economic%20Disparity%20in%20Israel.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Faith Under Occupation: <http://eappi.org/resources/eappi-publications.html>



### III. EAST JERUSALEM ID CRISIS

Jerusalem is the political and spiritual and geographic heart of Palestine. Occupied East Jerusalem is a socio-economic and political center, with 35% of the Palestinian economy dependent on the metropolitan Jerusalem area. It is an integral part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), as recognized by the international community and relevant United Nations (UN) resolutions.

In 1980, Israel adopted the “Basic Law” on Jerusalem, which ratified the annexation of occupied East Jerusalem to Israel. The international community does not recognize this annexation, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 478. This Resolution rejected the Israeli measure as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

According to the 2009 US State Department International Religious Freedom Report: “Many of the national and municipal policies in Jerusalem were designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem.”<sup>72</sup>

After the 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem, Israel gave Palestinian Jerusalemites the status of “permanent residents”, meaning they are treated by Israel as foreigners living in Jerusalem. This effectively renders the Palestinians of Jerusalem as immigrants in their own homes, “allowed” to live in Jerusalem conditionally. The unlawful conditions upon which these people’s residency depends include a demonstrable constant presence in the city as well as their ability to “prove” to Israeli occupation authorities that they are Jerusalemites. Any significant movement outside Jerusalem, whether within the occupied West Bank or abroad, carries with it the risk of losing the residency permit and by extension homes, businesses, titles and deeds of any sort.

Palestinian Jerusalemites run the risk of having their residency revoked if Israeli authorities deem that Jerusalem is no longer their “Domicile”, in other words their “center of life”. This is liable to occur if a Palestinian Jerusalemite resides outside of Jerusalem for what is deemed “a substantial amount of time” regardless of the reason. From 1967 to 2010 Israel revoked the residency rights of 14,526 Palestinian Jerusalemites, with the vast majority of these revocations, 79%, happening between 1995 and 2011.<sup>73</sup> Residency or ID revocation means banishment from Jerusalem; with those affected barred from visiting their families or being in their home-city.

There are a number of other similar discriminatory policies, which are quite clearly designed to strip Palestinian Jerusalemites and Palestinian Israelis of their fundamental rights, identities, and their ability to carry out normal lives. In 2003, Israel introduced the *Nationality and Entry into Israel Law*, which prohibits spouses of Israeli citizens and East Jerusalemites from residing with their families in Israel or East

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<sup>72</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2009/127349.htm>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/documents/category/2-working-papers?download=1028%3Abadil-kairos-wp>

Jerusalem if they are Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>74</sup> This restriction also extends to all Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza who seek entry for their spouses from abroad.

Similarly, Israel considers any child of a Palestinian Jerusalemite born in the West Bank or Gaza as having been born “abroad”. Only in the case of Palestinian Jerusalemites, this child is ineligible to receive his parent’s Jerusalem residency and would not be permitted to live in his Jerusalem home. This policy ensures that any child of East Jerusalem residents born in the West Bank or Gaza cannot be registered as a Jerusalem resident and therefore cannot receive a Jerusalem ID.<sup>75</sup> This forces many Palestinian Jerusalemite families to move out of Jerusalem in order to stay together.<sup>7</sup> This forced option has a direct economic, social, and demographic impact on Jerusalem’s Palestinian population, including its dwindling Palestinian Christians.

According to the Palestinian NGO *MIFTAH*, *between 1973 and 2000*, over 150,000 applications for family reunification in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were requested, with only a few thousand requests finally approved by Israel. But even this lengthy and difficult process has been halted since 2000, and the only applications granted since then have been denoted as “good will gestures”.<sup>77</sup>

Palestinian Christians, due to their dwindling numbers find the security of their homes and identities greatly compromised thanks to these and a number of other policies designed to vacate the holy city of Arabs in general. Due to the reality of their dwindling numbers, Palestinian Christians are particularly at risk of being completely vacated from holy city. A mere 11,000 Palestinian Christians remain in occupied Jerusalem, down from 33,000 sixty-six years ago.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/documents/category/2-working-papers?download=1028%3Abadil-kairos-wp>

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/documents/category/2-working-papers?download=1028%3Abadil-kairos-wp>

<sup>76</sup> [http://www.btselem.org/family\\_separation/east\\_jerusalem](http://www.btselem.org/family_separation/east_jerusalem)

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/documents/category/2-working-papers?download=1028%3Abadil-kairos-wp>

<sup>78</sup> [http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheets/FACTSHEET\\_Easter\\_2014.pdf](http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheets/FACTSHEET_Easter_2014.pdf)

#### IV. THE PERMIT REGIME

Under Israeli occupation, Palestinian daily life is in many ways controlled and overridden by a permit regime that imposes restriction on Palestinians' movement, urban development, and freedom of worship. It is a regime that entrenches the occupation, designed to establish absolute control over the lives and livelihoods of ordinary Palestinians.

Movement from Palestinian area to another is controlled. Israel does not allow Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to enter or live in East Jerusalem without a permit. In turn, Palestinian Jerusalemites risk losing permit to live in their own City if they move to another location within the West Bank for work or any other purpose. Palestinians from the West Bank are not permitted into Gaza without a permit while residents of Gaza cannot enter the West Bank for any purpose without a permit. This results in the effective fragmentation of Palestinian society, as people make life choices based on where they are allowed to reside rather than where opportunity may take them. This is true for university studies, work, marriage, and many other things that people who do not live under occupation naturally take for granted.

Another layer of the permit regime is that imposed on Palestinian construction. In addition to preventing Palestinian urban growth, Israel has adopted a series of zoning policies intended to make it difficult, especially for Palestinians in Jerusalem, to build new structures or expand existing ones. For example, Palestinians are only allowed to build and live on 14% of occupied East Jerusalem. This proportion has remained unchanged since 1967 even though the Palestinian population quadrupled in the meantime. Additionally, permits to build are prohibitively expensive and nearly impossible to obtain.

Estimates indicate that since the occupation of the city 1967, Israel has demolished more than 3,300 homes and other structures in occupied East Jerusalem, including several historic and religious sites, such as the historic Moroccan Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup>

As of 2008, about 93,000 Palestinians were essentially forced to build homes without licenses and proper construction permits since 87% of the area is designated off-limits for Palestinian use and most of the remaining 13% is already built up.<sup>80</sup> This allows Israel to carry out a policy of silent yet forced population transfer, whereby East Jerusalemites are systematically evicted from their homes for not having been able to acquire proper construction permits, an almost guaranteed reality, given that permits are so rarely issued to begin with. From 2005 - 2009, only 13% of the Jerusalem housing

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/New%20Publications/What%20is%20left%20of%20the%20two-state%20solution.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.badil.org/en/documents/category/2-working-papers?download=1028%3Abadil-kairos-wp>

units granted building permits were in Palestinian neighborhoods.<sup>81</sup> Currently, 22 Palestinian Christians are at risk of losing their homes in Jerusalem as they face threats of demolition or eviction. Many experts fear that if current trends continue, Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem, who once accounted for half of Palestine's Christians, will dwindle to 5,500.<sup>82</sup>

The right to freedom of worship is also subject to the permit regime. Palestinians wishing to worship in holy Muslim and Christian sites in occupied East Jerusalem must obtain a permit from Israeli military authorities. Palestinian Christians from all over occupied Palestine who wish to travel to East Jerusalem require permits to do so for any reason, including worship. The Palestinian Christian population in Gaza is particularly hard-hit, where all males aged 16 to 35 are not allowed to apply for said permit. This ensures that virtually no family can travel in its entirety.

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<sup>81</sup> <http://apjp.org/east-jerusalem-by-the-numbers/>

<sup>82</sup> Faith Under Occupation: <http://eappi.org/resources/eappi-publications.html>

## **V. Economic Hardships and Land Grab**

At present, there are at least 200 illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. These settlements control and in effect expropriate 46% of the occupied West Bank.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, Israel bars Palestinians from access and use of approximately 60% of the occupied West Bank. These areas, known as Area C, contain the most fertile land, water resources, minerals, and other unexploited riches in the occupied Territory. International experts agree that only through access to these areas can the Palestinian economy flourish and reach its unfulfilled potential, including the easing of the high unemployment rates among the youth.

This fragmentation has a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians, whose land is confiscated to build and expand these settlements. In reality, the confiscation of land means the demolition of Palestinian homes built on land set for confiscation, the razing of planted fields and orchards, as well as the barring of Palestinian farmers from accessing their fields.

Israel's wall, which is also illegal under international law, surrounds Palestinian cities and cuts them off from another. Bethlehem, for example, has been reduced to 13% of its original size due to Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land for the benefit of settlements as well as the construction of the Wall.<sup>84</sup> Residents of Beit Jala, a Christian town in the Bethlehem District, have lost over 70% of their land to settlements and the wall.

The Gaza Strip, an integral part of the occupied Palestinian land and economy. Israel has imposed an illegal siege on Gaza since 2006. This siege, which is an act of collective punishment, has devastated the economy.

By September 2008, Israel's siege had eliminated 99.4% of Gaza's once thriving industries, with only 23 of 3,900 left operating. In 2011, GDP per capita in Gaza dropped to almost 17% below the equivalent figure in 2005. At least a third of Gaza's farmland and 85% of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible due to the Israeli siege. Further exacerbating the situation is a chronic water crisis, whereby over 90% of the water from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption without treatment due to bombardment of sewage and water treatment plants and the lack of spare parts to repair them.

Daily life for Gaza's population, including its dwindling number of Palestinian Christians, a difficult challenge. Without lifting the siege, the prospects are bleak. A United Nations study has warned that if the siege continues, Gaza will not be livable by 2020.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> <http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/New%20Publications/What%20is%20left%20of%20the%20two-state%20solution.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.ochaopt.org/results.aspx?id=3358>

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/gaza-2020-liveable-place>



# State of Palestine

## May, 2014