



Ramallah, 27 June 2022

Council of Churches Holland

Excellencies,

I write to warn against Israel's escalating and systematic aggression against Christian Holy Sites and properties, Palestinian Christians, and thousands of years of Christian heritage, and by extension Christian presence in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land, and in the entire region.

40 days ago, the world bore witness to Israel's targeted killing of Palestinian Christian and veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and the subsequent brutal attack on her funeral and mourners. During Shireen's funeral, Israeli occupying forces stormed Saint Joseph's Hospital, smashed the back window of the hearse and stole the Palestinian flag covering Shireen's coffin, and attacked the pallbearers so rabidly that the casket almost fell to the ground.

Shireen was a national hero and a beloved leader among Palestinian Christians. Through her unmatched professionalism and dedication to telling the truth, she exemplified the Christian message of justice. In her life, she laid bare the sheer banality and absurdity of Israel's crimes and in her death, she laid bare to the world the ugliness of Israel's oppression. That is why Churches of all denominations took the unprecedented step of ringing their bells in unison to honor her memory.

We call on you to keep Shireen's memory alive by recognizing and paying tribute to her life and work and demanding justice for her criminal killing.

I also regret to inform you that on 8 June 2022, Israel's tainted judiciary system and its so-called "Supreme Court" greenlighted the illegal expropriation of Greek Orthodox properties in occupied East Jerusalem and the Old City by the Israeli settler group Ateret Cohanim.

Following this illegitimate ruling and emboldened by incitement and racist rhetoric against Christians and Christianity, Israeli settlers broke into the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem Church, sabotaged its property, tampered with its belongings, desecrated graves and disturbed the hallow grounds, threw garbage in the Church's yard, and threatened to kill its security guards.

These verbal and physical attacks are not incidental or random. They are systematic and planned. Two weeks ago, abetted, emboldened, and sanctioned by Israeli officials, and Israeli occupying forces, mobs of Israeli settlers and militias, including those who belong to Ateret Cohanim, invaded the Old City, including the Muslim and Christian Quarters, chanting "Death to Arabs", "We will burn down your villages", and "We will slaughter you all, you know we will kill you one by one".

A few months ago, Israeli settlers, protected by Israeli occupying forces, also illegally occupied the Petra Hotel in Jerusalem. Before that, Israeli settlers also vandalized the Greek Orthodox Chapel, poured paint into the chapel, urinated into the catacombs, and destroyed landscaping. They carried out these offensive acts under the protection of Israeli occupation forces, who have also stood by and offered protection while settlers littered and vandalized the basketball court branded with the Patriarchate logo. In the face of such unbridled and hateful attacks, the Greek Orthodox Church was forced to hire a private security guard who is also regularly threatened.

Israel's illegal expropriation of Greek Orthodox properties and housing buildings has far-reaching consequences. This war crime leaves hundreds of Palestinian families at imminent risk of forcible displacement and creates a coercive environment that threatens their continued survival in Jerusalem.



Israel's illegal expropriation of Greek Orthodox properties are neither an aberration nor isolated incidents. It is inherent in its illegal occupation and 55 years of systematic and structural subordination and persecution of the Palestinian people, Christians, and Muslims, to ensure Jewish supremacy and erasure of Palestinian history, present, and future

Similarly, Israel's militarization of Christian religious ceremonies, including Easter, and imposition of punitive measures through the combination of restrictions on access to churches, the subjugation of Holy Sites, and the brutal incessant violence inflicted on worshippers, violates the Status Quo. They willfully upend thousands of years of Christian heritage and Palestinian traditions and reflect an innate disdain for Palestinian Christians and hostility towards their very humanity.

For the less than 10,000 Palestinian Christians who remain steadfast in Jerusalem, Israel's ruling is a continuation of its systemic targeting and chasing Christians out of Jerusalem. The ruling and these attacks are part of Israel's systematic and institutionalized war against Christians that undermines the Status Quo and the unique, spiritual, religious, and cultural identity of Jerusalem. It also threatens to perverse the situation even further and ignite a religious war aimed at expelling Palestinian Christians from our homes, our churches, and our Holy Land.

Israel, the occupying Power, has long aimed to alter the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem to ensure Jewish exclusivity and dominance, including through war crimes of forcible displacements, demolitions, and control over holy sites, all in violation of international law, including United Nations resolution. Now, Israel and the settler groups it supports are taking over one of the most important sites of Christianity in Palestine and the region and therefore threatening Christian presence in the Holy Land and the entire Middle East region.

The situation in Palestine is beyond urgent. We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse, and this could be our last opportunity to save the Christian presence in Jerusalem and Palestinian Christians, the oldest Christian traditions in the world. The original Christians. The owners of the land who have been here for centuries.

Regrettably, diplomatic and political recourses have been exhausted. Action is now required. An urgent intervention from your side to protect the Christian presence in the Holy Land and Palestinian Christians who are being persecuted by Israel, the occupying Power, and are facing unprecedented dangers to their own existence, is imperative.

As such, the Palestinian Higher Presidential Committee for Churches urges and the international community to condemn Israel's crimes and attacks on Greek Orthodox properties and to take public and concrete steps to defend Christian holy sites and Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Jerusalem should be preserved as a place of tolerance, coexistence, prayer, and peace for everyone, as such your moral voice is much needed in these dark hours.

Please accept the assurance of my highest consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Ramzy Khouri

Head of Palestinian Higher Presidential Committee for Churches

Member of the PLO Executive Committee

