
Ecumenical Statement

U.S. Christian Leaders Stand With Jerusalem Heads of Churches

Advent is a time of forgiveness, salvation, and new creation, not one that imperils peaceful relations between faith communities. In August, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem wrote an appeal urging “all people of good will, to support us in order to ensure that no further attempts are made from any quarter to change the historical Status Quo [in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.]” We, as American Christian leaders, express our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, and our commitment to religious liberty for all faiths in Jerusalem.

As leaders of Christian churches and organizations in the United States, we hold that the Status Quo is key to maintaining peaceful relations among religious communities, ensuring their access to Jerusalem’s sacred places.

This set of agreements has mediated relations among the Christian communities of the Holy Land and the governing authorities for well over 150 years. With growing alarm, we wish to call attention to events of this past year that greatly jeopardize these historical arrangements. We are deeply concerned by the recent decision of the Israeli Court to grant a 99-year lease to properties owned by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate near Jaffa Gate to a private organization. This decision, which will be appealed by the Patriarchate to the Israeli Supreme Court, has been denounced as unjust by the Jerusalem Christian community. In addition, we are alarmed by a proposed law in the Knesset, which would further limit the ability of Christian Churches to maintain custody over their own sanctuaries. Church leaders in Jerusalem have correctly stated that these actions represent “a systematic attempt to undermine the integrity of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and to weaken Christian presence.”

We join with the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in affirming that “a vital, vibrant Christian community is an essential element in the make-up of [the Holy Land’s] diverse society, and threats to the Christian community can only increase the troubling tensions that have emerged in these turbulent times.”

We, as leaders of churches and church related organizations, have a natural and particular connection and felt concern to Christian communities in Israel-Palestine, and recognize the importance and sanctity of Jerusalem—not only for Christians but for Jews and Muslims as well. We earnestly petition for the protection of religious freedom and access to Holy Sites for all religions in Israel and Palestine.

As people of Christ, called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), we advocate for a lasting, sustainable peace in the Holy Land that will promote equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East. No solution can endure without guaranteeing access to Jerusalem's holy places and protecting the religious liberty for all peoples. Unilateral actions in East Jerusalem and incitement to violence create tensions that undermine trust and make resuming meaningful negotiations and achieving a lasting solution more difficult. This vision of a shared Jerusalem--a Jerusalem of Jews, Christians, and Muslims; a Jerusalem of Palestinians and Israelis--represents the only viable option for a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land.

As the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem call us to remember, the suffering of Christians in the Holy Land "do not affect one Church only; they affect us all, and they affect Christians and all people of good will around the world." For the sake of the common good, we, the leaders of American Christian churches and organizations, urge all followers of Christ to listen to and heed the pleas of the churches of Jerusalem. Let us call upon our government officials to bring our concerns over the future of access to holy sites in Jerusalem before the government of Israel. Together, let us lay the foundations for peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land. Let this be our hope this Advent.

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