



WARREN CLARK  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Churches  
for  
MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Aug 28, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Churches for Middle East Peace, our coalition of 22 national church denominations and organizations -- Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical -- is gravely concerned at the renewed actions by Israeli authorities to build a separation barrier wall across the Cremisan Valley.

The wall would separate over 50 families from the Bethlehem suburb of Beit Jala, many of whom are Christian, from their farm fields and livelihoods in the Cremisan Valley. This valley is also the location of a Catholic Monastery and a Catholic Convent that teaches children from Beit Jala.

Last spring an Israeli court issued an injunction against building the wall, saying it would have an adverse impact on Palestinians. The composition of the court changed recently and it issued a new order (under appeal) allowing construction of the wall to begin, starting with the uprooting of 200 year old olive trees upon which families depend for income.

This action is outrageous and gratuitous. It is gratuitous because while construction of the wall is ostensibly for security, the Cremisan Valley has been without security incident for over a decade. Defensive barriers erected on the border of nearby Israeli settlements years ago even have been taken down as unnecessary. There is no security need for this wall.

This action is outrageous because it comes about because this Palestinian land happens to lie between two Israeli settlements, Gilo (located near Jerusalem) and Har Gilo (located near Beit Jala). The Israeli government is demonstrating that it values this land far more as a suburban development than working towards peace and a two-state solution. There is a reasonable presumption that a pattern will be followed here, as it has been elsewhere, that once the barrier wall is built preventing free Palestinian access to the land, it will be eventually declared "abandoned", then "state land", and then developed by Israelis as part of Israel.

Mr. Secretary, please instruct the State Department spokesperson to say that in the interest of reducing conflict, it is the view of the United States that unilateral impediment of access to Palestinian lands imposed by Israel or unilateral seizure of Palestinian lands by Israel without mutual agreement of the parties, is illegal and unacceptable.

Sincerely,

Warren Clark  
Executive Director

Russ Testa  
Board Chair