



**Kairos Palestine**
A Moment of Truth **ومعه حف**

Kairos Palestine
Christmas
Alert 2014

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:1-20, NIV)

Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 2014



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Greetings in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Peace.

We pray to the Almighty God to bestow his blessings upon His Creation and especially upon the Holy Land where the Lord of Peace and Justice was born, grew up, dwelled and finally gave His life for mankind. These are very difficult times that our region is going through. Our faithful live under difficult circumstances, surrounded by walls and barriers. Our Syrian Orthodox Church collectively prays for peace and tranquillity, for social justice for every human being regardless of their faith, race or gender. We hope that, with the strength of prayer, our Almighty God will have a hand in turning the current events that are damaging the region and its inhabitants. We pray that love is planted in hearts of every individual regardless of their faith or citizenship so that everyone can live together in peace and harmony. May the grace, love and peace of our Lord be with you all.

Severios Malki Mourad

Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church in
Jerusalem, Holy Land and Jordan



The Lord's Prayer in Aramaic

Introduction

By Rifat Odeh Kassis

Another Christmas is approaching, and injustice in the land of peace remains rampant. This time again, we pray that the coming year will be different: that violence will cease, impunity will end, and peace with justice will begin to flourish.

On the 26th of November 2013, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (IYSP) and requested the Committee of the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to organize activities to be held throughout the year, in cooperation with Governments, relevant organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations. But, in fact, it has turned out to be one of the bloodiest and most painful years for Palestine. As I write these words, the government of Israel is waging a brutal war against Gaza. Hundreds of Palestinian civilians have been killed, including scores of children – the death toll today exceeds 1,400 with more than 8,000 injured. The destruction is staggering. The killing of a child, of a son or daughter, of a mother or father, can never be compensated or reversed. These wounds will ache forever.

But at times like these, we must also pay attention to what we can do, not just to what we can't. Let's think of the millions of Palestinian refugees around the world and how we can support them, advocate for them, and demand their right of return. Let's think of the millions of Palestinian families separated by Israel's land-grabbing, wall-constructing, movement restrictions, residency revocations, and how we can campaign for their reunification. And let's think, too, of all the Palestinians imprisoned by Israel – many of them children, women, and the elderly; many of whom have never been charged or tried; many of whom have been incarcerated for years upon years. They have suffered immensely, and

so have their families.

I am focusing on this latter plight because the World Council of Churches “World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel” (WCC/WWPPI) has chosen 2014 to be the year of prisoners, a year dedicated to solidarity with them. Indeed, we can do a lot for prisoners: we can work to reverse the injustices committed against them. We can pray for them and their loved ones, we can demand better treatment for them, we can advocate and lobby for their legal rights and for their release.

Many countries all over the world will be taking part in this Week of 21-28 September, carrying out activities in solidarity with prisoners and their families.

In this Christmas alert, we choose one Sunday during the advent to do the same: to shed light on the situation they face and to express compassion and support in the name of peace with justice.

Special attention must be paid to the situation of minors in detention. It is unacceptable that, in the twenty-first century, children as young as 12 are being arrested, detained, and tried in military courts. But this is exactly what is happening in Israel – an average of two children are arrested and abused there every night – and this reality must be changed.

We know it can be changed if we come together against oppression; if we settle for nothing less than true equality; if we unite in faith, hope and love. Your solidarity is essential, and we are grateful for it.

We feel that the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS) against the Israeli occupation is one of the main elements in solving this conflict peacefully. We are counting on you to be involved in implementing this campaign and advocating for it.

With this Christmas Alert, we are asking you to turn the tide by getting involved through the following activities:

1. Please distribute and study background materials and theological reflections in your own churches each Sunday of Advent to inform and educate your sisters and brothers about the situation of your Palestinian brethren living under Israeli occupation.
2. Please share the alert with congregations and dioceses across your country.
3. Please send letters of solidarity and support for justice in Palestine/Israel to the Israeli embassies in your own country. For further information, see www.allembassies.com/israeli_embassies.htm
4. Please come and see. We will fulfill our role in sharing the truth of our reality with you, receiving you as pilgrims coming to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will get to know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.
5. Please inform your Palestinian brethren about the way you have been involved with the Christmas Alert by writing us at this email address: info@kairospalestine.ps

With your help and solidarity, we can finally live in peace with justice: the peace that all people aspire to, the peace that was announced in Bethlehem.

Rifat Odeh Kassis
Kairos Palestine – A moment of truth,
General Coordinator

Kairos Palestine would like to thank all the contributors for their help in compiling this Christmas Alert, especially

H.G. Severios Malki Mourad, Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, Holy Land and Jordan; H.G. Archbishop Aris Shirvanyan, Chancellor of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem; H.E. Bishop William Shomali; Manar Makhoul, Kulsoom Ijaz, Rasha Bani-Odeh, Grace Zoughbi and Munther Isaac.

Please note that the deadline for the submission of the texts was in July 2014. Updated numbers and figures can be found on the websites of the contributing organizations.

First Sunday in Advent

From here he passed Peace be upon him

By Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights

From the birthplace of Jesus, stories are born. From the Palestinian Canaanite city that refused the invasions throughout the ages; a city that fought the Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman and Byzantine invasions. From the city that protected its shrines and holy churches. From occupied Bethlehem, the city that fell in the hands of Israel in 1967 losing vast stretches of its lands to settlements and is still under occupation 47 years later.

The road from Ramallah to Bethlehem wasn't long, because we were anticipating another human pain. At first, we headed to the Church of Nativity to meet Father Jamal Khader, head of the Latin Patriarchate Seminary in Beit Jala and co-author of the Kairos document to learn from a Christian point of view about the Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli occupation's prisons. We asked him about the Palestinian prisoner, the individual, the family, the extension and about the religious outlook to the Israeli existence, and he said:

“The Israeli occupation is the main reason, the major sin, the enormous injustice and the greatest evil. Land confiscations, house demolitions, displacements, withdrawal of Id's, prisoners, and martyrs are all practiced by the Israeli occupation. All the effects of those measures will disappear when the occupation ends.”

“As for the prisoners, they suffer the most among all Palestinians. They sacrificed long years of their

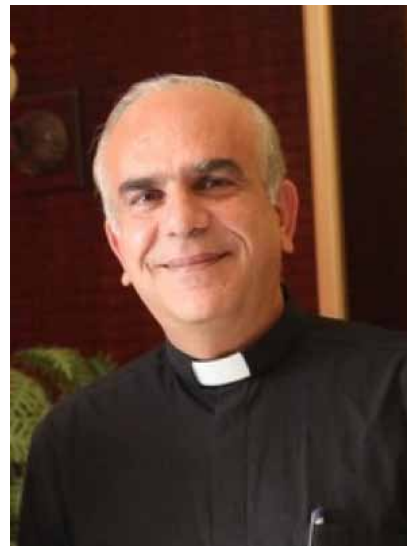
lives for others. Jesus at the beginning of his message says: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed,(...)”* (Luke 4:18)

This was the start of the message of Jesus in which he particularly mentioned the prisoners, the captives and the afflicted. The prisoners are part of the Palestinian struggle, an indispensable part of our freedom and independence. We as Christians, Palestinians, and citizens must stand by those prisoners who paid a high price for fighting the occupation”.

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When we asked him about the constant conflict in the prisoners’ families with joy and happiness, especially during the holidays, he said: “The humane side is very important, I experienced it well a few years ago when my brothers were in prison. Holidays are not joyful with constant longing and life is always disturbed. Visiting my brothers in prison was always a reason for consolation and happiness simultaneously, but it is definitely frustrating after the visits where you don’t see them and they’re not at home.”

“They are our heroes, our source of pride, we want them among us, we want them freed, and we want their pain to end so they can live a normal life like us”. He also added that: “We have to work together to end this greater evil, this occupation, and get rid of all its effects to eliminate occupation itself. We have to work hard to bring back the prisoners to their homes and their families so they can start a new life”



Father Jamal Khader - Rector of the Latin Patriarchate Seminary in Beit Jala

Fr. Jamal's words had a huge impact on us, perhaps because religion uplifts us emotionally, and ensures stability and tranquility. His messages led us to believe again that no matter how long it takes, the occupation will end according to all the Holy Scriptures that refuse war and injustice.

Within the area of Palestine's central mountains, between the heights of Bethlehem and on the east side of the mountains of Hebron, lies Taqou' town. We headed there to talk to a Palestinian prisoner's family. Riyadh Dakhilallah Li'mour was born on 18/06/1971 and was arrested on 07/05/2002, and then he was sentenced to 11 life sentences. He is a husband, a father and a prisoner who spent 13 years so far in Ramleh prison's clinic because of the seriousness of his health condition.

Riyad's parents both have worn-out faces and traces of a legendary struggle; their words swell tears in their eyes, while they speak quietly and try hard to send their hellos to the silenced soul in the Israeli occupation's prisons. They welcomed the center's staff as if they were on a date with freedom, as if we were closing the gaps between memories. Each one of them sees and hears Riyadh in his absence, yet in our presence, they could not cry.

Those faces belong to Riyadh's mother and father. His father started speaking after he made sure that his wife sat right next to him because she knows the details better than him: "Like all other children, Riyadh loved Palestine when he was young; he wanted to defend it and resist its occupiers. He was



around seventeen years old when he was shot in the first Intifada in the heart, which resulted in the resection of his liver, a part of the duodenum valve and his gallbladder after he entered into a coma for forty days in Al-Maqased hospital. During the second Intifada in the year 2000, he was shot again in his torso, in his thigh and his neck. Two of the bullets settled inside his body permanently. He joined the freedom fighters in Bethlehem despite his injuries and he was chased for two years, in which his parents saw him one time only. In 07/05/2002 Riyadh came to his brother's house to take some food, but right as he was leaving, the occupation forces were already surrounding the family's house and shooting at them."

The world stopped spinning in our minds, we choked on our tears. Our media and center's employee cards did not stop us from crying when his father said in tears: "They brought me and told me that Riyadh was in his brother's house, that he was a sniper and a killer, and we want him alive not dead. We do not want to blow up the house while he's inside, so they made me wear a bulletproof vest, and I went to Riyadh. He was scrawny and unable to breathe with his pacemaker outside his flesh. I asked him to surrender, but he said: "My loving father, I'm fighting the occupation and you want to turn me in?" So I said: "They want to kill us all and tear down our houses!", then Riyadh replied "As you wish father." They wanted to arrest him naked, but he refused that, he said goodbye to his son, then they chained him and arrested him. They sentenced him to eleven life sentences".

"He was transferred from Beersheba prison to Ramlah prison clinic because he had permanent pain and because he was medically neglected in prison, his pacemaker was damaged. He also suffered from headaches and fluid retention, fainted daily, and suffered from extreme exhaustion and fatigue". Riyadh's mother started talking in tears, looking at the ground "I'm proud of Riyadh, I wish him an immediate release, but Riyadh has been suffering from the beginning of his life. He had several operations. We sent him to Haifa and Yafa when he was a kid for treatment, and he had an open-heart surgery."

“I remember Riyad in every single moment. He is the closest to my heart among his brothers. He has been sick since he was six years old. He suffered a lot because of his sickness. I grieve for him so much because he faced great pain. He left a void in my heart.”

“I am the prisoner Riyad Li'mour's wife; we got married in 1991 when I was fifteen years old. We had our first daughter Aya after two years of marriage. We lived a simple life and had four more children. However; Riyad suffered from frequent blackouts, and when we took him to the hospital; we found that one of the heart valves was closed and that the pacemaker tore into his body and was coming out of his heart.”

“On the day he was arrested, I had the feeling that Riyad was in town, I sensed that something was wrong, and I was gripped with fear. The occupation forces were everywhere. When they arrested him an officer called me to say goodbye. I had my baby boy on my shoulder; Riyad woke him up and looked into my eyes. As they pushed him into the military jeep, I felt as if my soul was leaving my body. My precious Riyad said his last words to me: “Don't worry, we'll be out Inshallah. Take care of the kids and be strong.” But before they left, one of the soldiers said: “Don't ever dream about seeing him again. He won't return to you alive.”

“Riyad is away from me. I've been waiting for thirteen years. I wish he was there during holidays around my children. I wish he was part of the family gatherings in Ramadan. I played the roles of both the mother and the father and worked hard to raise my children. One of them is studying in the academy, and one of them is married, but Riyad is not with me. There's always something missing. My children need their father and his kindness. If Riyad leaves prison I think I will die out of happiness when I see him. Every time I put my head to sleep, I choke. Thirteen years felt like if I'm the one in prison.”

“My life doesn’t mean anything without him. Riyadh didn’t live his life – and we too didn’t live ours. Riyadh is not only in prison, he’s also sick. After my last visit, I broke down when I arrived home. Riyadh tried to convince me that he was in good health, but he had lost 16 kilos, his pacemaker is inoperative, he faints and his body does not absorb water. I can understand his condition just by looking into his eyes. As for my relationship with his family: it is good, but no one can replace Riyadh. During Al-Eid the house feels like an orphanage because my kids are not happy. They grew up without seeing their father. They didn’t feel him like other kids. He didn’t kiss their foreheads every morning, and they were not able to hug him.”

When we asked her about Ramleh prison’s clinic and her visits to Riyadh she said: “We go to Tarqumia checkpoint at 4 in the morning. They search us, and in case they suspect any woman, they strip-search her. We get to the clinic at around four in the evening. The visiting room is very full, and the clinic is a slaughterhouse, a temporary grave. I saw the prisoner Nahed Al-Aqra’s amputated limb, and the prisoner Mo’taz Obeido on a wheelchair. This only confirms that



this is not a clinic. This crushes my heart every time I get home.”

As for her universal human message; a message of a mother and a wife: “To every husband and wife in the world, feel with me and my children. If you leave your kids for one week only, your yearning will be indescribable. My children and I have been waiting for thirteen years to see his face. We hope that the entire world could feel our suffering and the prisoners suffering so that one day they can live a normal life with their children and wives. There is no happiness, no life without Riyadh. I don’t want him to be released a martyr – he is sick. Save him! I hope that God, the President and the whole world will stand by my side and will think about the sick prisoners. They should be our priority.”

The children:

His eldest daughter Aya didn’t talk much. She was born on 1/1/1993 and was nine years old when her father was arrested. She got married while he was in prison and she has two kids now: “My dad is a prisoner. I was in the third grade in my school when they let all the students out because there were Israeli soldiers around. I was so puzzled. I wished I could see him and I cried a lot. I grew up without him and got married without him. I wished that he could be the one to hold my hand and walk me to my husband’s house, but I didn’t see him. Every bride hopes that her wedding day is the happiest day of her life, but I, unlike others was crying all day. I wasn’t happy, but he was with me in my mind and my heart.” She said. “Since my dad is not around, I couldn’t even rejoice at having my kids. Every Eid I wish that he could come to visit me, knock on my door and hold me between his arms.”

Montaser: The eldest son was born on 27/9/1994. He was eight years old when his father was arrested. He graduated from high school and hasn’t seen his father. Montaser is now studying in the Military Academy in Jericho.



Montaser Riyad Li'mour



Mohammad Riyad Li'mour



Malak Riyad Li'mour

Lina: born on 3/08/1996 was five years old when her father was arrested. She is now in high school.

Malak: born in 17/09/1998 was four years old when her father was arrested. She is now in the 10th grade.

Mohammed: born in 8/10/2000 was two years old when his father was arrested. He is now in the 9th grade.

We turned off the cameras and the recorders, holding on to hope. We said our goodbyes and headed to the cars again where a bus was to take us to Ramallah. We knew for sure that inside every Palestinian house there is a painful story, created by the occupation with its arrogance and brutality, by injustice, displacement, oppression, imprisonment and martyrdom.

But, to be a human being is to leave your own prison. To be human is to be part of all this open air that gives life to space. To be human is to be the sun that gives the universe its splendor. To be human is to be a gushing spring unquestioning the land it flows in. To be human is to live as a human being in the meaning of your humanity, because the meaning of your humanity is feeling that you're part of this human entity that moved since the beginning of humanity on earth to give, to stir, to create, to explore and to make a new earth out of earth.



The Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights “Hurryyat” is a Palestinian non-governmental and independent organization that contributes to the protection of the Palestinian liberties, civil and political rights. Hurryyat strives to enhance the rule of law within the Palestinian society, and to provide legal, financial and psychological assistance to both the Palestinian prisoners detained in Israeli jails and their families. Please see www.hurryyat.net

Fatherhood

By Munther Isaac

The father in the Bible is the source of blessing and guidance for the whole family. Consistent with an Ancient Near Eastern family, he is the head of the family, the one responsible for its nourishment and safety. In biblical Israel, the father was instructed to teach his children the commandments of God. The book of Proverbs – and in particular chapter 4 – gives us an insight into the role and status of the father in biblical times:

A Father's wise instruction hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth..."

Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. (Proverbs 4:1-5, 10-11)

These words, written for a familial setting, exhibit the reverence fathers received in those days. There is an emphasis here on wisdom. Wisdom is the experience the God-fearing father accumulated over the years – and now he is to transfer to his children. The father transfers not only his "name" or "family heritage" to his children, but also his wisdom, experience, and godliness.

It should be of no surprise to us that the Bible portrays God as a Father. In other words, when the

Bible thought of an image to reflect the way he looks to us – he chose that of a father to his child:

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. (Ps. 103:13)

If the previous verses from Proverbs portray the father as the one who gives instruction, even discipline, this verse shows the loving and compassionate side of fatherhood. In a sense, the earthly father reflects the image of the heavenly Father to his children, when he nourishes and loves them. The father thus is window to his children through which they can see and experience the love of God the Father.

We can thus see that a family in which the father is missing, for whatever reason, will suffer greatly as a result. First and foremost, there will be a lack of leadership, guidance, example and blessing – and the burden will mainly fall on the shoulders of the mother. The children will also miss their father's love and compassion to them.

In the Palestinian society today, many children are raised up without a father, because the father is either imprisoned or killed in the conflict. The impact of this phenomenon is immeasurable. The familial nature of the Palestinian society helps in providing safety and care for these children – in a manner similar to the biblical mandate of taking special care of the orphan. But even this does not compensate the absence of the father, and nothing can really do. Moreover, a child who grows up with his father imprisoned – or worst killed in the conflict – will possibly develop feelings of loneliness, bitterness and hatred. His or her life might be forever shaped by this.

It is in these circumstances that we need to hold fast, and seek to embody, the biblical promise about the nature of God:

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.
(Psalm 68:5)

Munther Isaac (PhD Oxford Centre for Mission Studies) is assistant professor at Bethlehem Bible College and director of the conference Christ at the Checkpoint. He is also a Vicar at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. His PhD research focused on the theology of the Promised Land.

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And the prisoners? The thousands of prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons are part of our reality. The Israelis move heaven and earth to gain the release of one prisoner, and those thousands of Palestinian prisoners, when will they have their freedom?”

Second Sunday in Advent

Generations apart?

The Continuous Forcible Displacement of the Palestinian People

By BADIL

Since 1948, Israel developed a regime that combines occupation, apartheid and colonization which acts as the root cause of the ongoing forced population transfer of the Palestinian people. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been displaced on both sides of the Green Line (1949 Armistice Line between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory), as a result of Israel's policies and practices. Forced population transfer is illegal and has constituted an international crime since the Allied Resolution on German War Crimes was adopted in 1942. The strongest and most recent codification of the crime is found in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which clearly defines forcible transfer of population and settler-implantation as war crimes.¹

Below are two testimonies of Palestinian refugees – first and third generation – who talk about their lives, dreams and hopes. Both live in Dheisheh Refugee Camp. Dheisheh Refugee Camp is located in the Bethlehem Governorate, south-west of Bethlehem City in the occupied West Bank. It is one of the 59 Palestinian refugee-camps dispersed throughout the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. It was established after the expulsion and flight of more than 750,000 Palestinians who were forcibly displaced in 1948. Those who fled to Dheisheh originate from 46 towns and villages including

¹ For more information, please see Amjad Alqasis and Nidal Alazza, Introduction to Forced Population Transfer: The Case of Palestine (Bethlehem, Palestine: BADIL Resource Center for Residency and Refugee Rights, March 2014). Available on: http://www.badil.org/phocadownload/Badil_docs/publications/wp15-introduction.pdf

Jerusalem, Ramle, Asqalan and Hebron. The 13,017 inhabitants of the camp today live on less than one square kilometer of land rented by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).²

Rif'a Hammad (78). Born in the village of Bayt 'Itab in 1933, lives in Dheisheh refugee camp

“Before the Nakba our life was simple. We were farmers and the land was the center of our lives. We ploughed the land and planted it with watermelon, melon, lentils, corn, wheat and so on. We also had some chickens, cows and goats. The entire family worked the land. Everything we needed came from it, and from our livestock. It's not like today where you buy everything from the shops. At that time, we did not have shops and we did not need them. We used to do everything ourselves: milking, making yogurt and even baking our own bread in the Taboun. We were totally self-sufficient. One night everything changed.

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News arrived about massacres by the Zionist militias of the Hagana in some villages in the north such as Deir Yassin and Al-Qastal. We were told that they were killing and massacring Palestinian in the north of the country and that they were moving south. My father was very concerned about the family, especially his girls. People were saying that girls were assaulted and raped by the militias. So when the militias reached Deir Al-Hawa, which is the village ahead of Bayt 'Itab, my father decided that we had to escape. In one night our village along with 27 villages was emptied under the fear of the massacre and rape. In one night we lost everything, we became refugees, and the saddest thing of all is that we became refugees in our homeland.

² For more information, please see BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian residency and refugee rights, Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Survey of 2010-2012 (Bethlehem, Palestine: BADIL Resource Center for Residency and Refugee Rights 2012).

We moved to several locations, and at the end we settled in Jericho. None of us ever thought that after 66 years we would still be refugees. We thought that everything would return to be as it was before the Nakba. That it was only temporary. At the beginning, it never occurred to me that we wouldn't return. We fooled ourselves. People were saying: 'one more month and we will go back to our home' and after that month again the people said that we had to wait another month. However, the more time passed, the more our hope to return to our lives diminished. This was an ongoing internal conflict: one moment you feel and believe that it's a matter of time, that for sure we will return to our homes because justice will run its course, but at other moments you feel frustrated and pessimistic. I'm too old, I know that I will not be able to go back, but this situation cannot last forever. I know that soon I'm going to die, but the hope of returning will not die with me. I have hope in the new generations. After 66 years of our Nakba we still feel that our home is waiting for us and that we will return, if not me my grandchildren, Inshallah.

If I could go back, I would go right away. I will leave everything that I possess in the camp without thinking twice. I would even accept to live under a tree, but at least it's my home tree. I'm not the only one who feels this way, all my relatives and friends, even the ones who fled to Jordan: if they have the chance to return they would come running. We would even accept to live with Jewish-Israelis as long as we have the chance to return to our homes.

After 66 years, the camp still represents a temporary situation. It's the shelter where we found refuge as a consequence of displacement. However, I don't see it as a permanent residency. It is temporary. We will be able to return only when the balance of power will change. The Zionists managed to displace us because we were a simple peasant population. One day this will change. The camp is only a reminder of something wrong that happened to us. Thank God, the new generations are conscious. We succeeded to hand them not only the keys of our homes but especially the love and the belonging to it. I have hope in them; they still have the enthusiasm and the hope that we lost over the years."



May Hammash (21) and her grandmother Rif'a Hammad (78)



May Hammash (21), lives in Dheisheh refugee camp, originally from the displaced village of Bayt 'Itab:

“When you grow up, the daily life and events remind you of refugeehood. There is no way out of being a refugee: you live in a camp, you go to the UNRWA schools and health clinic, and your friends are mainly refugees that, with time, may become prisoners and martyrs.

For me the camp is symbolized by the tent: the asylum and the ethnic cleansing that happened to us, and at the same time it represents the submission to our status and situation, the betrayal of the Arab regimes to reach a solution, the savagery of the occupation, the uncaring attitude of our authorities and the hypocrisy of the international community.

My deceased grandfather, to whom I was very attached, used to tell us many stories of how life was in Bayt 'Itab. He used to take us to the top of a mountain near Bethlehem and point to the horizon telling us: “Do you see those houses in

the background and the goats? There in the last spots? Do you see? That is Bayt 'Itab ... Our village... Your village.”

I see my homeland in my grandparents, because they lived there. The way that my grandmother sees or speaks about the homeland is different from the way I see it or speak about it. The way she sees the Palestinian people is different from the way that I see them. She sees one Palestinian nation and people; she describes them as the best population united and full of values.

As our grandparents have the dream and the hope of returning to their villages, I and my generation also have this dream and hope, but somehow it changed or developed. Hopefully, one day I will be free to decide where to live.”



Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights is an independent, community-based non-profit human rights organization mandated to defend and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. Our vision, missions, programs and relationships are defined by our Palestinian identity and the principles of international law, in particular international human rights law. We seek to advance the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people in this basis.

To learn more, please visit www.badil.org

“Refugees are also part of our reality. Most of them are still living in camps under difficult circumstances. They have been waiting for their right of return, generation after generation. What will be their fate?”

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Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 1.1.6



Impact on Aggrieved Party and Descendants

By Grace Zoughbi

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept
When we remembered Zion.
There on the willow-trees
We hung our harps...
How can we sing the songs of the LORD
While in a foreign land?
If I forget you, Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
If I do not remember you,
If I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.”
Psalm 137: 1-2, 4-6

Imagine. Imagine her standing there - face pale, her smile faded, and her heart burdened - her unhappiness clear for all to see. She was far from home; miles away from where her heart lay. Her spirit was no longer free to sing, dance, or fly. Although her harp hung on the branches of a nearby tree, she couldn't sing, couldn't even hum a tune. All she could do was sit by the river of Babylon and weep; her warm tears streaming down to join with the flow of the great river as it rolled along.

How could one lose everything so quickly, she wondered? No land, no home, no Holy City, no temple, no identity. Nothing was the same in Babylon as it was in Jerusalem. Even though she was not alone – family, friends, and relatives all had been exiled with her – still, she was a stranger, a refugee, a deportee. This was the

heart-breaking reality.

Days, months, and years passed and the memories of Jerusalem never left her mind. She waited, her dream of returning to her homeland growing with every day that passed. But she never did.

As Psalm 137 so aptly illustrates, a homeland is something that is deeply rooted in heart and mind, something embedded in our being. With the Psalmist we ask, “How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137: 4) Indeed, how can we? Can our hearts rejoice in a dry and barren land?

As I walk through the narrow streets of Bethlehem today, I can’t help but notice the refugee camps all around. The pain and frustration of being within a half hour’s drive from one’s former home, but not to be permitted to return, is what the residents of the Bethlehem based refugee camps live with daily. Over six decades have passed and the reality has not changed. From tents to small houses, which then became crowded on to other small houses as the population expanded, the refugees still endure in the little town of Bethlehem. Even after several generations, they are still longing to be back in their villages across the horizon. They wonder what has become of them, for no place is like home.

In addition to the refugees in Bethlehem and the West Bank, Palestinian Refugees in Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria all dream of one day returning to their land “that flows with milk and honey.” Will they, or will they not? A question that no one knows the answer to, but while they dream, our prayer and hope is that the Lord will do great things for them. That in the midst of their distress they will be given “a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah 61: 3)

Who said that days of bitterness, suffering, longing and agony have to last? Who said that one cannot

hope or dream for a better tomorrow? Who said that the days of exile will never end? Who said that the aggrieved party and descendants will always be aggrieved? Who said that the girl by the river of Babylon will always weep? For: “Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” If not for these refugees, then surely for their children and grandchildren. In the end it was the children and grandchildren of the Psalmist who were able to report:

“When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us and we are filled with joy.” Psalm 126:1-3

The Lord has done great things indeed. The Lord continues to do great things among His people! We are His people, the apple of His eye, His flock.

In many ways we are all refugees needing a homeland. Being scattered and homeless is the last place people want to get to, yet as important as it is to have a physical home and shelter, how much more important it is to have a spiritual shelter! The refugees in Bethlehem have been displaced from their homes, and have found a place to accommodate them, but one feels compelled to pray that these refugees all find God as their shelter in times of need as well as in ordinary times. God is the safest shelter for all his children. With the Psalmist we can say:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”
Psalm 46:1-3

Amidst life's many instabilities, God Almighty remains our one and only solid rock; let us lean on Him! And whilst we do, let us remember that "We long for a better country- a heavenly one... and that He has prepared a city of us!" (Hebrews 11: 16)

Grace Al-Zoughbi is a Christian Palestinian from Bethlehem and serves as a teacher at Bethlehem Bible College. She holds a M.A. in the Theology of Transformation and works currently on her PHD. Grace joined the staff of Bethlehem Bible College in 2011, and she is currently the head of the Biblical studies department.



Third Sunday in Advent

The Effect of Family Unification Laws on Spouses

By Society of St. Yves

The Family Unification Law, as applied towards Palestinians living in Jerusalem, is dire as one can imagine. Spouses caught up in this legal and bureaucratic limbo suffer from a lack of access to family life, financial stability, and psychological well-being. The state of Israel has decided to grant family unification for Jerusalemites who have West Bank spouses on a rare case-by-case basis. This stems from the problematic status Palestinian Jerusalemites were given in 1967. The legal status attributed to the Jerusalem population directly after the Six-Day-War in 1967 was «permanent residency.» This status was created by extending the application of the «Entry Into Israel Law 1952» which gives discretion to the Israeli Minister of Interior to accord various types of visas to persons who reside within Israel that do not fulfill the requirements of the Jewish «Law of Return 1950» and the «Nationality Law of 1952.»

Permanent residency is a precarious status; it does not confer a nationality or full civil and political rights. For example, Palestinian Jerusalemite residents can engage in municipal elections, but not in elections on a national scale. They are entitled to social benefits, pay all taxes, and receive travel documents from the State, however, the Ministry of Interior that grants the status is also empowered to revoke it under certain circumstances. It does not make any sense to apply a permanent residency status on Palestinian Jerusalemites because they are not immigrants; in fact, they are the indigenous population of the land.

As such, Palestinian Jerusalemites have a hard time unifying with their families if they come from the West Bank, because of Israel's failure to accord them their full family rights. The only real avenue for meaningful redress for a Jerusalemite spouse to unify with his or her West Bank spouse is by utilizing the exceptions set forth in the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law 2003 whereby a temporary permit (B1 status) may be granted on a yearly basis. This Law effectively froze the process of family unification by providing that family unification is prohibited for all residents of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) save three exceptions.

First, those who obtained a status before the enactment of the law can maintain this status under certain circumstances by proving that Jerusalem is their center of life (where they pay taxes and educate their children, for example) and that they have a clear criminal and security record. Second, new applicants can under certain conditions apply for permits so that the non-resident spouse may live with the resident by completing the requirements discussed under the first exception and by satisfying an age requirement. If the permit is for the wife, she must be 25 years old or above and if the permit is for the husband, he must be 35 years old or above in order to apply for family unification.

Third, in certain circumstances, where there is a humanitarian situation, it is possible to apply to the humanitarian committee at the Ministry of the Interior. The term «humanitarian exception» itself is vague, undefined, lacks criteria and leaves enormous room for discretion. There is a lack of transparency as there are no public records providing how many cases are reviewed and what arguments are valid for the success of an appeal, namely, what circumstance is considered a «special humanitarian need.»

The “humanitarian exception” is very hard to prove because Israel does not see the financial burdens spouses face as a result of the inability to unify as satisfying this exception. According to several cases the Society of St. Yves has worked on, the strongest satisfactory reason that satisfies the

“humanitarian exception,” is sickness, especially sickness faced by the spouses’ children. However, there are many files stacking up regarding cases with sick spouses or children, which the organization has still not received an answer for. Sometimes, even when one provides medical documents proving life-threatening conditions, it can take up to a year before an answer is given.

Even after the approval is granted for this exception, it needs to be reappraised every year, to show that the humanitarian need still exists. This means that spouses must present recent medical papers each time they wish to renew the permit to stay in Jerusalem. There is no strict obvious rule but the Humanitarian Committee should be persuaded and convinced that the situation is still essentially the same. There are burdensome bureaucratic procedures in every application. Israel does not grant an ID to approved “humanitarian exception” cases. Again, Jerusalemite Arabs are the indigenous population of Jerusalem and it does not make sense to grant family unification for their spouses from the West Bank on such a rare case-by-case basis.

For example, F.B., a Jerusalemite, got married in 2002, to a woman who is originally from Gaza but holds Jordanian nationality. In 2002, F.B. applied for spousal unification in Jerusalem, as he presently lives in Jerusalem while his wife and five children live in Jordan with her parents. Their separation is enormously taxing on the couple and the children. Because of F.B.’s need to travel a long distance to spend time with his family, the family unification freeze has put a great strain on him financially and physically.

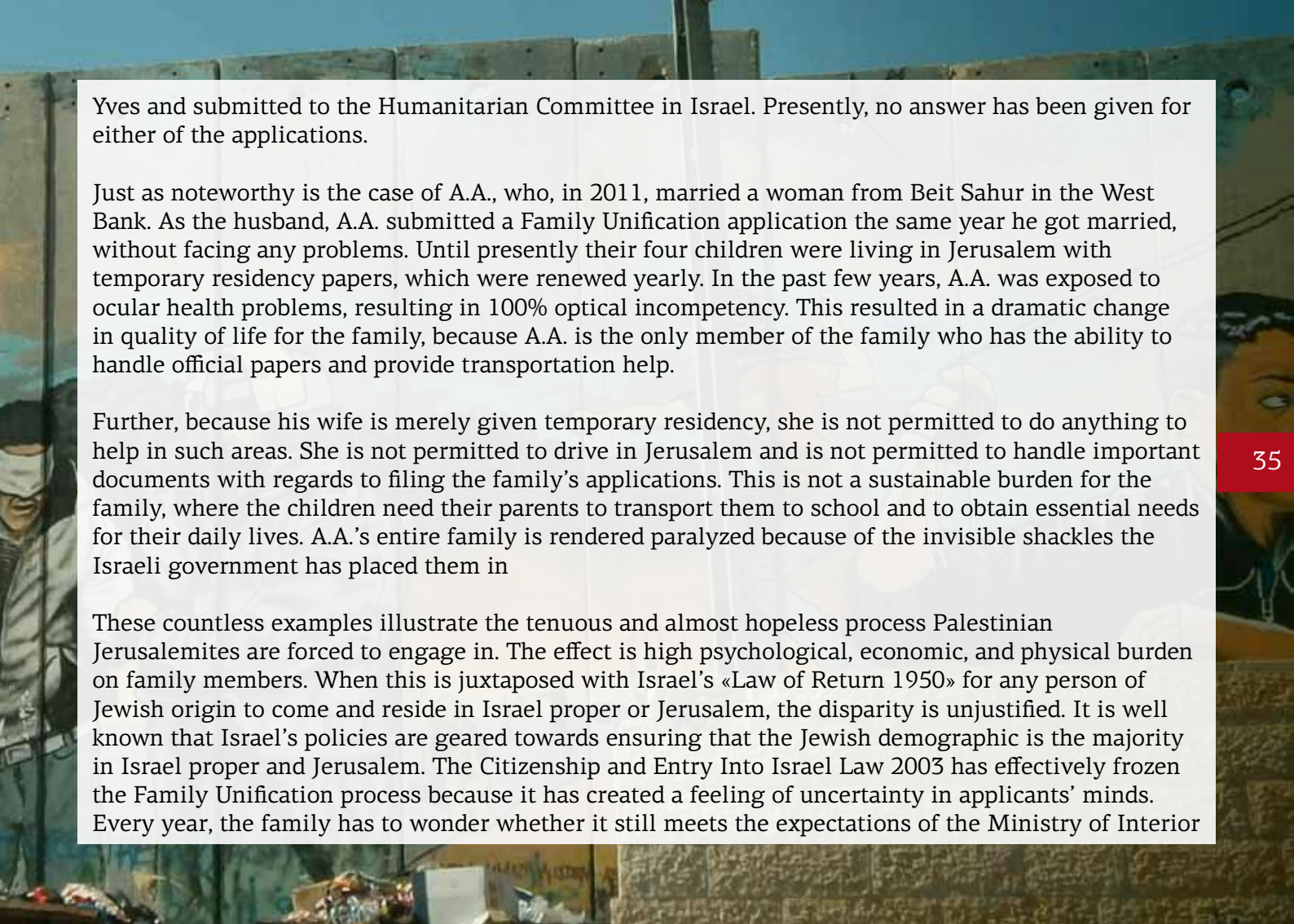
Further, his children lack a meaningful relationship with him because they have spent their entire lives away from their father. He is under constant stress because the Israeli Ministry of Interior Affairs continues to pose new requests for various official documents, a process he has engaged in for 12 years to date. The family unification application has not been rejected for any specific reason, but the never-ending requests by the Israeli Ministry of Interior Affairs for various official documents,

has rendered F.B. tangled in a bureaucratic chokehold. The process of requests for official documents effectively hinders many Palestinians from gaining approval for their family unification applications. The right to establish a family free from vagrancy and dispersion is a basic and essential right for human beings. Israel's failure to approve the application has robbed F.B., his wife and his children of this right for 12 years.

In another example, R.Y., a Jerusalemite, married a Bethlehemite in 1982 and moved to live with him in Bethlehem. Her family was comprised of herself, her husband, 4 daughters and 2 sons, one of whom was under age. However, in 2011, her husband was faced with emotional turmoil and committed suicide. In 2010, due to the psychological problems the husband was suffering from prior to the suicide, R.Y. left her home in Bethlehem with her children to reside with her parents in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Her family was now suffering from a stressful situation, where the children had Palestinian identification documents (IDs). All of the children had reached the age of majority, 18, except for the youngest son. In 2013, an application for family unification was started by the Society of St. Yves for the youngest son, the application is still pending and no answer has been provided to date. He is now 13 years old; however, the process to unify a child after he or she reaches the age of 14 becomes more tenuous. The older children who have reached age 18 can no longer acquire Israeli ID's due to their age, which means they are residing with their mother in Jerusalem illegally, despite the family's extremely devastating and pernicious circumstance.

This situation, expounds upon R.Y. extreme physical and psychological distress. The four children's predicament is critical because if the Israeli authorities catch them in Jerusalem, they are under the threat of being deported to the West Bank, causing more unnecessary grief on an already suffering family. An application to unify the rest of the children with R.Y. was also started by the Society of St.

The background of the slide features a photograph of a concrete wall, likely a West Bank barrier, with a person's face partially visible on the right side. The person appears to be looking towards the camera.

Yves and submitted to the Humanitarian Committee in Israel. Presently, no answer has been given for either of the applications.

Just as noteworthy is the case of A.A., who, in 2011, married a woman from Beit Sahur in the West Bank. As the husband, A.A. submitted a Family Unification application the same year he got married, without facing any problems. Until presently their four children were living in Jerusalem with temporary residency papers, which were renewed yearly. In the past few years, A.A. was exposed to ocular health problems, resulting in 100% optical incompetency. This resulted in a dramatic change in quality of life for the family, because A.A. is the only member of the family who has the ability to handle official papers and provide transportation help.

Further, because his wife is merely given temporary residency, she is not permitted to do anything to help in such areas. She is not permitted to drive in Jerusalem and is not permitted to handle important documents with regards to filing the family's applications. This is not a sustainable burden for the family, where the children need their parents to transport them to school and to obtain essential needs for their daily lives. A.A.'s entire family is rendered paralyzed because of the invisible shackles the Israeli government has placed them in

These countless examples illustrate the tenuous and almost hopeless process Palestinian Jerusalemites are forced to engage in. The effect is high psychological, economic, and physical burden on family members. When this is juxtaposed with Israel's «Law of Return 1950» for any person of Jewish origin to come and reside in Israel proper or Jerusalem, the disparity is unjustified. It is well known that Israel's policies are geared towards ensuring that the Jewish demographic is the majority in Israel proper and Jerusalem. The Citizenship and Entry Into Israel Law 2003 has effectively frozen the Family Unification process because it has created a feeling of uncertainty in applicants' minds. Every year, the family has to wonder whether it still meets the expectations of the Ministry of Interior

and whether their granted permit will be renewed. Moreover, the “humanitarian exception” merely serves as an invisibility cloak that hides the suffering of Palestinians who are unable to unite with their families and what the hurdles they deal with on a day-to-day basis.



The Society of St. Yves is the Catholic Center for Human Rights, working under the umbrella of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Through legal assistance and advocacy, the organization is countering human rights violations stemming out of the occupation. Main working fields are issues related to residency rights for Palestinians in Jerusalem, cases related to right to property and land in Jerusalem and the West Bank as well as cases which relate to freedom of movement for Palestinians. To learn more, please visit www.styves.org

“ Reality is the separation between members of the same family, making family life impossible for thousands of Palestinians, especially where one of the spouses does not have an Israeli identity card. ”

Family Reunification - Which law governs it?

By H.E. Bishop William Shomali

In this reflection, we shall lay emphasis on husband-wife reunification, and not on family reunification.

Spouses separate for different reasons. For instance, there is the case of separation because the husband is obliged to work abroad, and that may happen through illegal emigration - in which case he abandons his wife, his children for a while, waiting for better times ahead, with a possible reunification. Ultimately, either the husband would come back to his country, or call for his wife to join him. Such a step however is subject to laws of the host State. Certain countries facilitate immigration, subject to possible conditions. Others, however, choose to put impracticable conditions, in order to block the flow of new immigrants and therefore to protect their economy and demographic balance.

Another example consists of someone getting married to a partner carrying a different nationality. Should they be willing to live under the same roof, either of the two feels compelled to draw the other to him, according to his own country's rules. In most of the cases, foreign countries, to facilitate things, would grant the nationality to the other partner, within possible conditions.

The immigration facilities laid by foreign countries stem from the natural right of persons to marry and start a family, to reproduce and raise children. The family forms indeed the fundamental cell in each society, and the society is bound to protect and help it. Therefore it is not normal that spouses get separated, for a separation would prevent them from living under the same roof, depriving children from their right to enjoy a normal family care.

This natural right, which we are referring to, is impregnated inside the human conscience and belongs to natural law. As such it is globally accepted among all nations, cultures, ethnic groups and religions – without any exception.

To sum up this right, spouses have both the duty and the right to live together under the same roof, in order to achieve the aims of their matrimony – including mutual cooperation, conjugal love, reproducing and raising children.

Coming back to the question embodied in the title: which law governs family reunification? The answer is that political laws, natural laws as well, intermix confirming this same right. The matter becomes yet more important when we recognize that this right reaches up to a divine law.

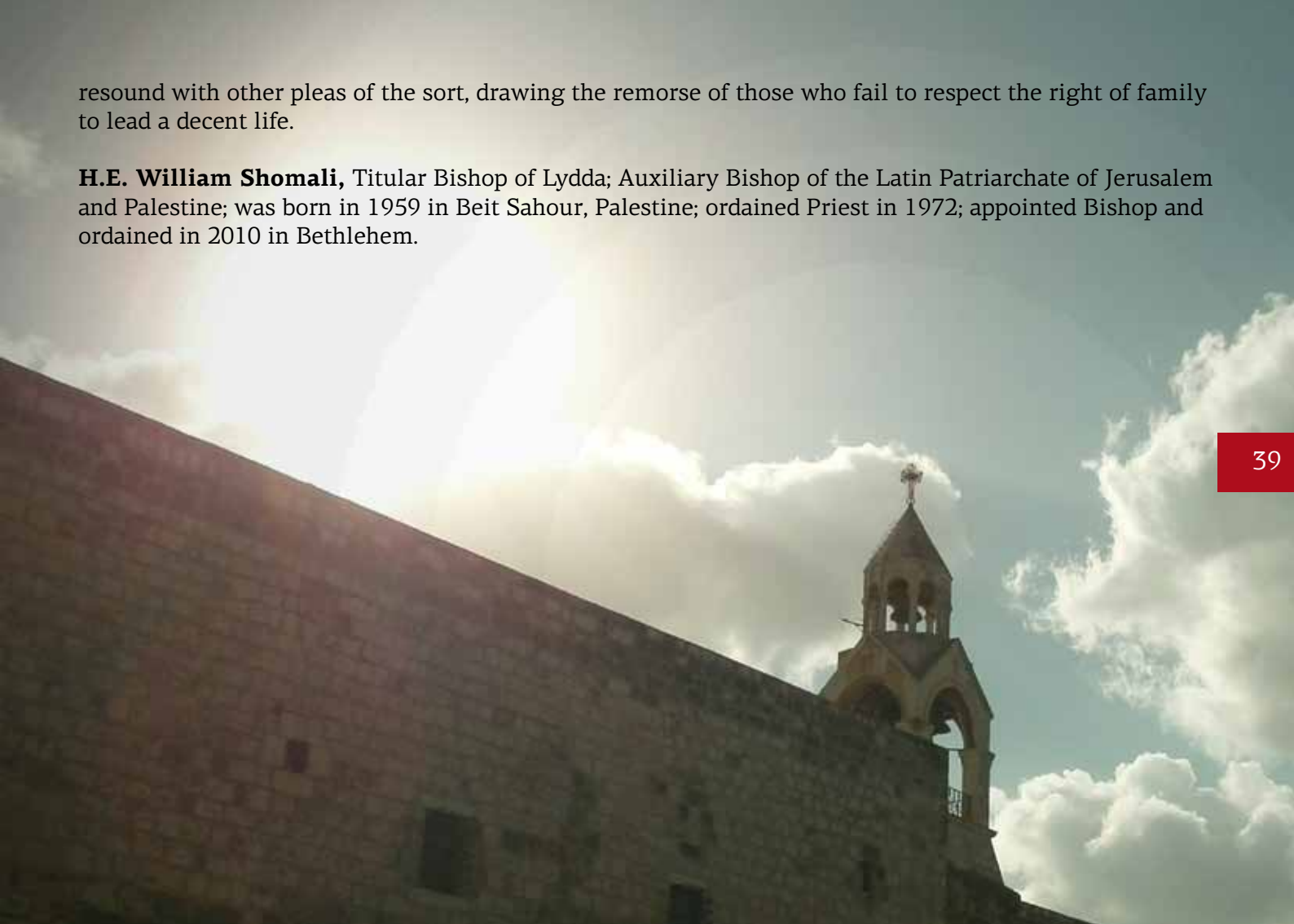
When the Pharisees asked Jesus about the possibility of divorce, He answered and said: “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female? For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What God has joined together, let no man separate” (Mt 19:5). This means that family reunification under the same roof is a binding divine law.

In light of these principles, how can we evaluate the political laws prevailing worldwide, concerning family reunification? Those who issue unjust family-related laws and put them in force, go contrary not only to natural law but also to divine law, committing thereby a crime against God’s ruling. Anyone, who can oppose and fight against these unfair laws, but does nothing, commits indeed a crime against humanity.

Therefore it is the duty of legal organizations, UN bodies and the Church to join hands to say a brave word in the face of governments which do not show respect to this law. We wish that this plea will

resound with other pleas of the sort, drawing the remorse of those who fail to respect the right of family to lead a decent life.

H.E. William Shomali, Titular Bishop of Lydda; Auxiliary Bishop of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Palestine; was born in 1959 in Beit Sahour, Palestine; ordained Priest in 1972; appointed Bishop and ordained in 2010 in Bethlehem.



Fourth Sunday in Advent

2014 – UN-Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian people

“(…) It is time for a radical change of concepts and positions. Israelis and Palestinians can live together in peace and mutual love if the root causes of injustice are removed. Education given to the people was negative in past years. A new education must start: love is possible, coexistence is possible. The concept of fear and insecurity should change. The concept of killing so easily hundreds of men, women and children must change. Lords of war, you are on the wrong path. All the killings, all your violence, all your weapons will not bring you security and will not take away your fear.

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The ways of peace are ways of peace. Only these can lead to security and peace. Israel and all Israel's friends must understand that after sixty years of killing and violence, the salvation and the survival of Israel will never be achieved by the present violence.. Israel's friends must help Israel understand, if their love for Israel is sincere and if they truly care for the human being, whether Israeli or Palestinian, things must change. (…)

We call upon all who care for human dignity, and human life to act now without any further delay. We call upon the international community, governments, churches and civil society to exert pressure on Israel to abide by international law and to lift the siege on Gaza and put an end to its military occupation of the Palestinian Territories in accordance with UN resolutions. And to overcome and remove all the obstacles that have hindered the long awaited peace. It takes wisdom and compassion over and above being fair to both parties of this conflict – especially when one is an occupier and the other is occupied. There needs to be an exerted effort and resolve to bring about peace for all:

Israelis and Palestinians whereby everybody feels secure and enjoying freedom and equal rights in a democratic sovereign state. No more repetition of invasions and massacres and senseless killing, whether individual or collective as it is happening now in Gaza.

We call on the Churches to assume their responsibilities towards the Holy Land, the land of their roots, if they truly care for their roots, and for the Holy Land and its people. Many churches seem to be indifferent or intimidated to take action. Churches need to put pressure on Israel and also on their governments to end Israeli impunity and hold her accountable. Such Diplomatic pressure is needed now more than ever. It is a question of saving lives but also imposing accountability for criminal acts. As in similar International situations, now is the time for Economic and Military Sanctions.”

Statement from the 24th of July 2014: “Diplomatic pressure for Peace: A call for Sanctions” from Kairos Palestine and National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine (NCCOP)

***“I ask this empathy also from the people around me -
I ask them not to hate.”***

By Widad Shabani

What do you ask from your own people to do?

I ask from the Palestinian people, that we – Christians and Muslims alike – are all praying for peace and freedom, peace and freedom not only for Palestinians but for all people. I am a mother and as a mother I feel with every human being who has lost a beloved one, no matter if he or she is from the Jewish, Christian or Muslim side.

I ask this empathy also from the people around me - I ask them not to hate. We are all human beings, we have the same feelings and we all suffer from the Israeli occupation.

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What do you ask from your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?

I ask my sisters and brothers worldwide to feel with us, to support us, to see the human being in us as well as the impact of the Israeli occupation on our daily life. I ask my sisters and brothers worldwide to come and visit Palestine and the Palestinian people, to listen to them, to hear their stories, to understand them. And I ask my sisters and brothers worldwide to see the human being in us, a human being who is suffering.

Widad Shabani, born 1936 in the Old City of Jerusalem, belongs to one of the three remaining Palestinian families inside the so called “City of David” in Silwan. She is the mother of two daughters and six sons and grandmother of 23. She lost one of her sons at the age of 16 in the 1980’s, when he was stabbed by Israeli settlers.

***“Remember Bethlehem all the year round,
not only at Christmas time.”***

By Victor Bartaseh

What do you ask from your people to do?

This is a message from the heart, from my belief as a Palestinian Christian to my fellow Christians in the Holy Land. You are the walking, talking and living stones of the Holy Places. I ask you to unite into one strong body so that you can survive through the turmoil we are experiencing as Christians of the Orient during this very critical political period. I ask you not to abandon your Land, your home, your olive trees and your orchards. Remain steadfast in your homeland, this land needs you. You are the original citizens of this Land. This Land is the property of your great grandfathers; you are the flourishing gardens of this land that will remain sending the scent and spirit of love and peace all over the World.

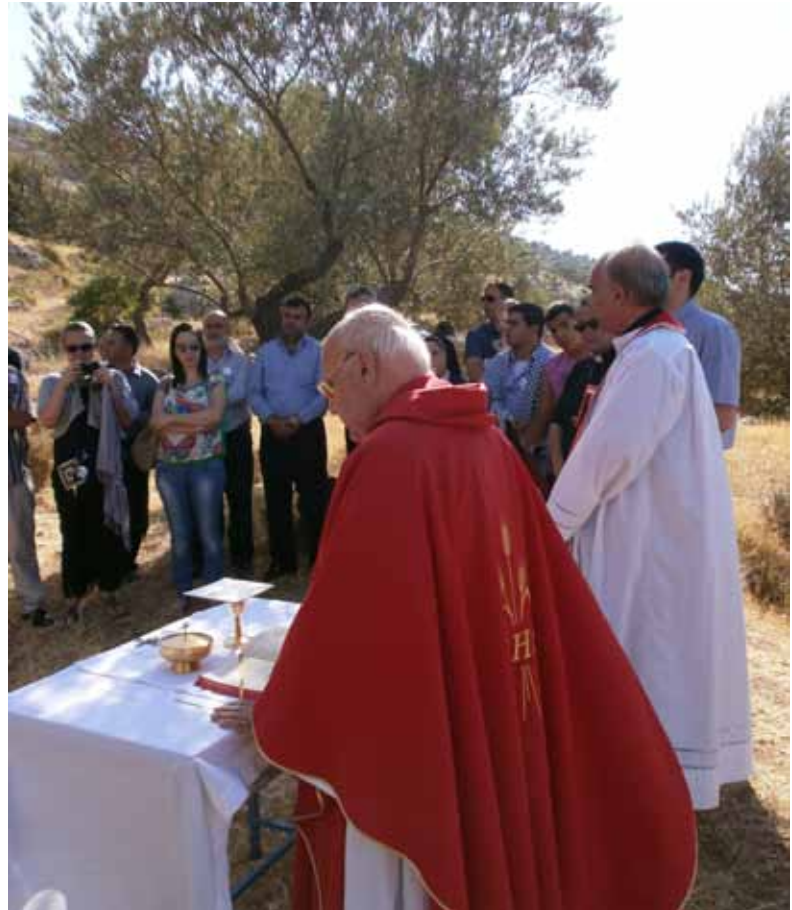
What do you ask from your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?

My message to our sisters and brothers all over the World is: remember that there are Palestinian Christians living in this Holy Land; remember that Bethlehem is the cradle of Christianity and the star of Bethlehem shines all over the world sending a message of love and peace, though, we lack this peace living behind walls of separation and hatred. Remember that we are the keepers of the Holy places. Remember all the year round not only at Christmas time.

We need you to come on pilgrimage all the year round so that you will stand by us, endow upon us the strength and spirit we need to stay in our Land and home, so that the Christian belief and spirit will remain hovering over this Holy Land.

We need you to stand by our legal and just cause through your governments to end this awful Israeli occupation of our homeland. We need you to pressure your government to put pressure on the Israeli government to implement all UN resolutions concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as soon as possible so that we can have peace here and all over the world.

Dr. Victor Hanna Jubrail Batarseh, born in 1934 in Bethlehem, is Director of the Beit Sahour Medical Center. He is active in the political and social work in the Bethlehem Community and was elected Mayor of Bethlehem from 2005 until 2012.



“If you can dream it, you can do it” - Walt Disney

By Sukaina Khalawi

What do you ask from your people to do?

I know very well that the time I'm writing my contribution is a very sad one; we witnessed a cruel attack against the Palestinian people by the occupying forces. I know very well also that the soul of Mohammad Abu Khdeir who was burnt alive is around and will never surrender. But I also believe that in the history of the world, there has not been a more genuine struggle for freedom like ours. My message to you all is that struggle is not about carrying weapon, or having tanks. No -struggle is about loving our lands, believing in our cause, struggle is about educating our children how to love their land and be a real asset to their nations. From here, I ask you all including myself to defend our beloved Palestine, preserve our lands, and to boycott any action or attitude or product that maintains the occupation, always believing that tomorrow will be better and the sun will shine soon.

What do you ask from your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?

We Palestinians love our life and believe that with your solidarity, with your support, with your faith in our cause and with your belief that our cause is just, with your effort to spread out our messages, and with your pressure on your governments to stop supporting the occupation, our dream of freedom will become reality.

Sukaina Khalawi, born in Bethlehem in 1982 holds a Master degree in Human Rights and a BA degree in Social Work and Psychology. Currently she is working as Grant Management and Program Development Officer at Defence for Children International-Palestine (DCI) and as Regional Coordinator for Middle East and North Africa DCI Network.

“We need to overcome the Israeli-imposed legal-cum-political division.”

By Manar Makhoul

What do you ask from your people to do?

There is a growing realization among Palestinians worldwide in the past ten years that our predicament is one. Palestinian citizens of Israel (the 150,000 Palestinians who remained after the 1948 Nakba are now 1.2 million); Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem (occupied in 1967, but who do not hold Israeli citizenship); Palestinians who live under the 1967 military occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; and Palestinian Refugees who live all around the globe. These are five legal categories, and they represent political divisions that have evolved over the years.

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The Oslo ‘peace process’ which began in the early 1990s entrenched such political divisions, excluding Palestinian citizens of Israel and the Palestinian refugees (including the internally displaced within Israel) from the political process that would determine their fate. That is, the vast majority of Palestinians (more than 7 million refugees, and 1.2 million Palestinian citizens of Israel – out of the total number of 11 million worldwide) are marginalized and have no say about their own future. The growing frustration from the ‘peace process’, which was not designed to actually achieve reconciliation between the Palestinians and the Israelis, led many Palestinians to reconsider their positions. Only by understanding the root causes of the conflict can one start to think about a solution to it. Seeing that the predicament of Palestinians did not begin with the 1967 occupation, but with the inception of the Zionist ideology, is vital to fighting the geographical, legal, and political fragmentation of Palestinians. Identifying Zionism as the enemy of Palestinians everywhere is at the base of the growing Palestinian activism these days, and it is key to any future action.

Palestinians need to unite politically. We need to overcome the Israeli-imposed legal-cum-political division. There is a need to gather under one political body that represents all Palestinians. This may mean the rehabilitation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), or the creation of a new representative body altogether.

What do you ask from your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?

International solidarity with the Palestinian people is vital to our struggle. Citizens need to pressure their governments, societies and the private sector. Solidarity activism with Palestine needs to rest on the above understanding of the history of the conflict, and led by the parameters set by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, until it complies with international law and universal principles of human rights.

The global BDS campaign should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

Manar Makhoul is the Manager of Research and Production Unit at BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights. Manar holds a PhD degree in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Cambridge.

“Side by side in every region we can overcome and survive!”

By Sana Malash

What do you ask from your own people to do?

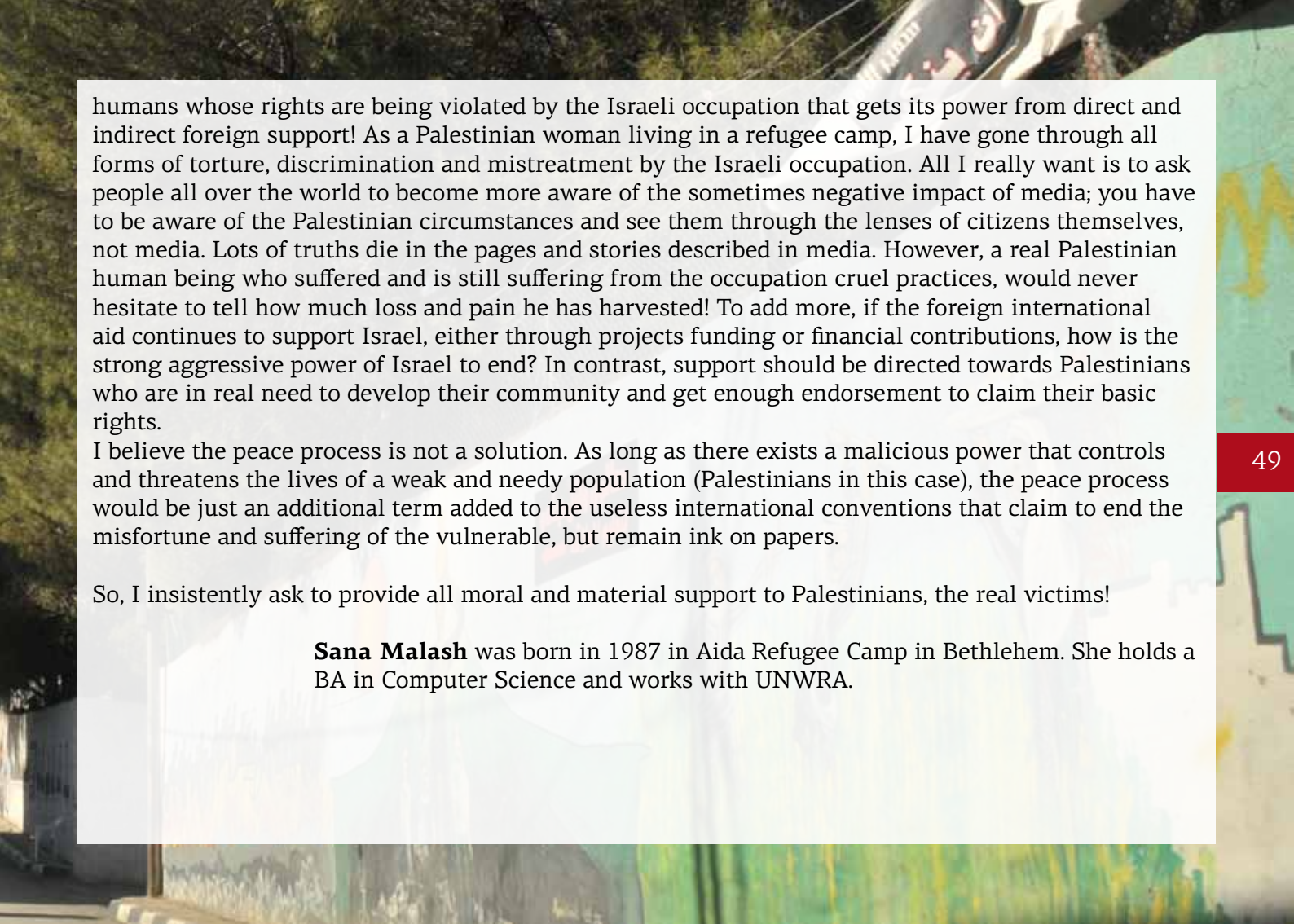
I am a refugee girl who lives in a small camp called Aida camp, exactly beside the separation wall. It's really so difficult to live in a crowded place; houses are so close to each other. Moreover the situation in the camp is not calm at all, every while and then the Israeli soldiers throw tear gas like crazy, so gas is all you breathe. As a Palestinian woman who faces this horrible situation daily, I ask my people to help those who live in these troubled areas, by giving them courses in first aid and making activities for kids (because the camp is their only playground).

They should also work hard to reach peace. We are so tired and tensed from this situation, it is time to feel safe. We live in fear for our children having many social problems. To achieve that, we have to work cooperatively to come up with plans that help women, children, and also students, because they don't have the real opportunities to work in their fields. Another important point is to keep in touch with youth; it's the best way to employ their experience in the society. Side by side in every region we can overcome and survive!

What do you ask from your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?

The question should simply be “Why are people worldwide waiting that Palestinians ask for help?” Is it just the normal case to provide any kind of aid and support to your brother whose rights are being violated on the other side of the world? Does doing right and assistance to mistreated and vulnerable people need to be asked for?

I am sorry to say that most people around the world are almost blind to the truth that Palestinians are



humans whose rights are being violated by the Israeli occupation that gets its power from direct and indirect foreign support! As a Palestinian woman living in a refugee camp, I have gone through all forms of torture, discrimination and mistreatment by the Israeli occupation. All I really want is to ask people all over the world to become more aware of the sometimes negative impact of media; you have to be aware of the Palestinian circumstances and see them through the lenses of citizens themselves, not media. Lots of truths die in the pages and stories described in media. However, a real Palestinian human being who suffered and is still suffering from the occupation cruel practices, would never hesitate to tell how much loss and pain he has harvested! To add more, if the foreign international aid continues to support Israel, either through projects funding or financial contributions, how is the strong aggressive power of Israel to end? In contrast, support should be directed towards Palestinians who are in real need to develop their community and get enough endorsement to claim their basic rights.

I believe the peace process is not a solution. As long as there exists a malicious power that controls and threatens the lives of a weak and needy population (Palestinians in this case), the peace process would be just an additional term added to the useless international conventions that claim to end the misfortune and suffering of the vulnerable, but remain ink on papers.

So, I insistently ask to provide all moral and material support to Palestinians, the real victims!

Sana Malash was born in 1987 in Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. She holds a BA in Computer Science and works with UNWRA.

Five years of Kairos Palestine

An Ecumenical Palestinian Call for Action

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Kairos: A time to act now

By Nora Carmi

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Many of you have accompanied Kairos Palestine ever since the document entitled “A Moment of Truth” was launched in Bethlehem five years ago. Co-authored by 15 ecumenical male and female Christian leaders, religious figures and thinkers, the document was a cry coming from the Palestinian suffering articulated in faith, hope and love. Are not these the three tenets of our Christian belief? Today, the document has evolved into an agenda, a way of life accepted by many of the local population, blessed by church leaders and political figures both locally, regionally and yes, on the way to become a global movement for justice and righteousness. In his visit with Pope Francis, last May, the Lebanese Maronite Patriarch of the Middle East, Cardinal Bishara Ra’i held up the Kairos Palestine document at the end of a worship service in Beit Sahour and said: “This is The Road Map to Peace.”

For those of you who are not familiar with the word Kairos, let me start by the definition of this Greek word. It refers to the qualitative time frame in which divine interactions and occurrences happen. Simply said, it is the present moment, an opportune moment, a decisive moment in which, seeing the glory of the grace of God, even in the suffering of the land and the people, we are called to respond, to

act, to be transformed and to change. It happened in South Africa in 1985 and we know that it will happen in Palestine/Israel, in the Middle East and beyond. Our call is for us, Palestinians, Muslims, Christians and Jews, Churches, law and decision makers and the international community. The ultimate aim of the Kairos Call is justice for all. In the land where prophets spoke of justice at least 200 times in the Old Testament, there are two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians of three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam who are longing for a just peace – long overdue – but who still do not know the “things that make for peace”.

If the suffering, oppression, displacement and clear apartheid have been going on for more than six decades, it is because of what the Kairos document clearly states:

1. Theologies that justify crimes and legitimize oppression and occupation. This theology is far from Christian teachings because true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed. It is a call to justice and equality among all peoples. This is my Christian belief anchored in Jesus Christ. Is this also yours?
2. The impunity of Israel, its disregard of international law and international resolutions as well as the impotence of legal structures and bodies such as the UN to implement existing laws that can enforce the oppressive occupation to rectify its wrongs and also to hold Israel accountable, like other states, for violation of all forms of inalienable rights.

With a lot of courage, Palestinian Christians in 2009 declared the military occupation of our land a sin against God and humanity, because the occupation distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinians living under occupation and deprived of their basic human rights bestowed by God.

An occupation that calls for violence in the name of God Almighty is subordinating God to temporary

human interests and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice. In the Kairos Document in chapter 2.5 we say:

“We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice”.

So how do faith, hope and love help us achieve the vision of Kairos?

Faith:

We believe in one God, a good and just God. We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and that everyone's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty. We believe that Jesus Christ came in order to fulfill the Law and the prophets. All prophecies have been fulfilled in him and through him. We believe that The Word of God is a living word, casting a particular light on each period of history. It is unacceptable to transform the word of God into letters of stone petrified and transmitted from generation to generation that pervert the love of God. We believe that our land has a universal mission. The meaning of the promises, the land, and election of the people of God include all humanity. The promise of the land has never been a political program but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. Our connectedness to this land is a natural

right. It is a matter of life and death and we know that the word of God cannot be the source of our destruction.

This is our response to biased theologies that attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights. Thus the promises, wrongly misinterpreted become a menace to our existence and the “good news” a “harbinger of death.”

The first challenge is for the theologians: Deepen your reflection on the Word of god to rectify your interpretations so that you may see in the word of God a source of life for all peoples.

Hope:

We have to differentiate between hope and optimism, because realistically the present situation does not promote any quick solution. The clear Israeli response leaves no room for positive expectation. However, hope is first and foremost faith in God. Hope also means expectations for a better future and at the same time not chasing after illusions. We realize that peace is not close at hand but if we accept that we are called to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit that dwells in us, we derive strength from this vision to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it. We Palestinian churches have learnt to bear the strength of love rather than that of revenge, a culture of life rather than a culture of death. This is a source of hope for us, for the Church and the world. We, in Palestine, will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active church in the land of the Resurrection.

The second challenge is for the Church: The mission of the church is prophetic; to speak out with courage, honestly and lovingly. If you have to take sides, let it be with the oppressed, and as followers of the same Christ to stand with the sinner calling to repentance, life and restoration of the dignity bestowed by God and that no one has the right to strip away.

Love:

The commandment of love, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you is easier said than done. Love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression. We therefore see resistance as an expression of love. Love invites us to resist and resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian, if it is a resistance with love as its logic. We all can engage in

- Nonviolent resistance like the weekly marches in West Bank villages against the wall and settlements
- Civil disobedience
- Divestment and economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by Israel and its illegal occupation. The object of these campaigns is not revenge but to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. The aim is to free both peoples from extreme positions.

The Kairos Call to you:

My appeal to you today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back? Have you realized that this is the only way to help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?

Locally, Kairos has moved from a document to a movement that is owned by all church-related organizations and groups included in the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine (NCCOP) where there is a genuine cooperation in division of responsibilities according to expertise in relief and advocacy. Our connection with the international arena is because we believe in the clout and power of the Church. We cannot accept that the Jewish lobby intimidates us, cripples us and lulls us into a roaring silence, blocking our conscience into passive inaction. The Kairos concept of transformation is a beneficial for all as it is for us Palestinians. It is a call for analyzing our stands, confessing our inequities and failures, and together moving towards the steadfast liberation of all.

This message confirms that together we can bring about positive change. I urge you during this Advent Season to travel physically or mentally to this very small spot in the world and the poor manger from where the message of peace was proclaimed. After all that the people of this area have endured in 2014, especially in Gaza, my prayer is that this Christmas be a special one for you and your loved ones and “Let there be peace on earth as in heaven.”

Nora Carmi

Project Coordinator Kairos Palestine – A Moment of Truth

“Christ is born and revealed”

“Blessed is the revelation of Christ”

This is the greeting at Christmas time that the members of the Armenian Orthodox faithful, both clergy and laity, pass to one another proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ’s divine birth and revelation to the whole world.

God assumed human form and body through His Son Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago through a virgin called Mary and then he combined His divinity with humanity in a perfect union. He became incarnate to restore man in his original grace that he had lost due to his sin of rebellion against God’s will and was sentenced to death. God had created Adam in His own image and breathed in him His Holy Spirit. But the devil lured Adam through his life companion Eve, to eat from the forbidden tree of life. Adam and Eve ate from its fruit and thus committed their deadly sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-Begotten Son of God, came to this world as second Adam to wipe out this original sin from the fallen man and once again to give him a chance of attaining immortality. His miraculous divine birth was heralded by the host of angels that sang “Glory be to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill amongst men.” In this way his message of peace and love was given to the humankind so that they would love one another and peace may prevail on earth and consequently hatred and wars disappear. Jesus Christ is the Prince of peace, and all His believers should be peace-lovers and even peace-makers.

Unfortunately nowadays we lack peace in our Holy Land, that is in Israel and Palestine and in our neighboring countries, Syria and Iraq, because evil is at work sowing enmity and pulling up people

against people. We constantly pray for peace and justice, for love and understanding in our region.

The Christmas season is a time to emphasize the purpose of inaugurating salvation of men through our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ and pursuing peace and love. The Christian churches throughout the world herald this message. Whereas most Christians celebrate the birth of our Lord on December 25 at present, the most ancient date was January 6 celebrating the birth and baptism of our Lord together under the name of “Epiphany” or “Theophany”, meaning of “revelation of God” covering the events of the birth and baptism of our Lord.

December 25 was the date of a pagan festival inaugurated in 274 A. D. as the birthday of the unconquered sun which at the winter solstice begins to show an increase in light. The church of Rome was unable to stamp it out. In 336 A. D. the Pope decided to move Christ’s birth from January 6 to December 25 as the Sun of Righteousness and to leave the celebration of his baptism as Epiphany on January 6 along with the adoration of Magi. This change gradually was adopted by different churches over the next several hundred years except in the Armenian Orthodox Church that had no reason to deviate from the traditional date. So, the Armenian Orthodox still maintains January 6th under the name of Epiphany by celebrating the Nativity and Baptism of our Lord simultaneously.

However, in the Holy Land the Armenian Church observes the Epiphany of January 6 by the Julian Calendar that corresponds to the Gregorian Calendar of January 19, a difference between the calendars being 13 days.

In 1582 A. D. Pope Gregory XIII had learnt that the Julian Calendar had been by eleven minutes and fifteen seconds longer from the actual calculation measuring the time and the seasons. One day was added to the leap year and thus ten days were omitted from 1582. This new measurement of the calendar came to be known as Gregorian Calendar.

If and when the Greek Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches give up the Julian Calendar and adopt the Gregorian Calendar they will be celebrating Christmas on December 25 together with the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in the Holy Land, and the Armenian Orthodox Church will observe the Nativity and baptism of our Lord as Epiphany on January 6 by the Gregorian Calendar.

The spirit of Christmas is the same in all the Christian churches regardless of the differences in the currently established dates. Our Lord Jesus Christ was born as our Savior and the messenger of peace and love. Let us adhere to Him as our Savior and Prince of Peace.



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ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE

Թվական
Date

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"Blessed is the revelation of Christ"*

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23 June, 2014
Jerusalem

Archbishop Aris Shivanian
Archbishop Aris Shivanian
Chancellor of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem



Kairos Palestine – A moment of truth

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Kairos Palestine is a group of Palestinian Christians who authored “A moment of Truth” – Christian Palestinian’s word to the world about the occupation of Palestine, an expression “of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”, and a call for solidarity in ending over six decades of oppression. The document was published in December 2009.

Kairos Palestine

A Moment of Truth

**A word of faith,
hope and love
from the heart of
Palestinian suffering**



**We proclaim our word based on our Christian faith
and our sense of Palestinian belonging.**

**Are you able to help us get our freedom back?
for this is the only way you can help the two
peoples attain justice, peace, security and love.**

www.kairospalestine.ps