



CHRISTMAS ALERT

2017



CHRISTMAS ALERT 2017

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, “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 Savior 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 favor 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 2:1-2:1, NIV)

Kairos Palestine Advent and Christmas Alert 2017



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CHRISTMAS ALERT 2017

Preface

From Bethlehem, I wish you a holy and joyful Christmas. I wish you to be able to see, at the same time, God's love and human sufferings, everywhere and here in Bethlehem.

I wish you to see the glory of the Eternal Word of God, as says Saint John: «In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and he lived among us and we saw his glory» (Jn 1: 1.14).

I wish you to be filled with God's love, and to be able to fill with the same love the hearts of so many in the world of God, and especially here in Bethlehem and in all the Holy Land. More love, with definitive peace and justice, in the hearts of Israelis and Palestinians.

For the salvation and the peace of all human beings, in all the universe, Jesus, the Eternal Word of God, was born in Bethlehem. However, many human beings, in different parts of the world, and here in Bethlehem, are still suffering from human injustices. Where the glory and the love of God were revealed to all humankind, the human being is still under oppression and military occupation.

On Christmas day you pray and rejoice. To make your joy more full and complete, look to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, and where people still live without peace, and help them have more peace and real joy.

In the sky of Bethlehem, centuries ago, the Angels proclaimed: Glory be to God in the highest and peace on earth to people of good will (Lk 2: 14). But until today,

that peace, here in Bethlehem, is still to be done. Your celebration and your prayer should be an action to make peace. Jesus told us all that you can make it, despite all the world's destructive powers, when he said: «Be courageous, I have conquered the world» (Jn 16: 33), and: «In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works» (Jn 14: 12).



The churches heard the Angels' proclamation of peace. But, perhaps they got used to what is happening in the Holy Land, and feel that nothing is needed to make any change. The situation of war in which we are living became normal for so many, They forgot the truth which is the complete human equality of all human beings, even Israelis and Palestinians, to have same rights, same freedom, same right to an independent state. They forgot the sufferings of the people, the political prisoners, the houses demolished, the wall, the checkpoints.... All these are the sufferings of a people for whom also Jesus was born. For the salvation of all, of both, Israelis and Palestinians, Jesus was born. And peace still required is peace for all, for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

As you contemplate the glory of God in the little child,

Jesus, born unto us in Bethlehem, you are called to look down to the earth, to see human misery and war. You see all Jesus' brothers and sisters sufferings, all over the world, and especially here in Bethlehem. You are invited to say a word of truth to the Israelis who can decide peace or war, and to the Palestinians under Israeli military occupation. Say a word of truth, and call both of them to reconcile. Tell the strong who are the decision makers that reconciliation is possible, that love is possible, that living together in peace and justice is also possible.

You are called to act, to make your Christmas a prayer, and an action to install love, peace and justice in Bethlehem and in the hearts of all in all Palestine and Israel.

Our peace is not only in our hands. It is in your hands as well. It is in the hands of the strong and of the lords of war. Peace of the Holy Land is a world question, for all states and churches. And all, states and churches, seem to be shy and hesitating in taking necessary steps for peace and reconciliation. They are shy in saying a word of truth to the powerful of this world, who proclaim peace and continue to make war.





You celebrate a joyful Christmas. Let your joy be more perfect, by getting stronger in dealing with the powers of this world, with your governments, in order to achieve peace, even if they have to make pressure where pressure is required. You are required to help both sides to enter the same true path of justice and peace.

Christmas is for all. The song of angels is peace for all. You cannot live a true Christmas, while there is no Christmas peace and joy somewhere else in the world, and here in Bethlehem itself, the place where the Word of God appeared to humanity for salvation and peace.

This Christmas alert for the year 2017 proposes four themes to your prayer, reflection and action: The land, the people, the Christians, and the continuous human rights violations. Try to have a Christmas of faith, of sincere obedience to God, a Christmas of love, of peace and justice making in Bethlehem and all the Holy land. You can make a difference. Jesus has told you that you can: «Be courageous, I have conquered the world» (Jn 16: 33), and « «In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works» (Jn 14: 12).

I WISH YOU A HOLY AND JOYFUL CHRISTMAS.

H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah

served as the Archbishop and Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem from 1987 to 2008. Patriarch Sabbah was ordained a priest for the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in June 1955. He was a parish priest for a few years before being sent to the University of St. Joseph in Beirut to Study Arabic language and literature. Shortly thereafter, he became director of schools for the Latin Patriarchate. In 1980, he was named President of the Bethlehem University. In 1987, Pope John Paul II appointed him Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, making him the first native Palestinian to hold the office for centuries. Since 1999, Patriarch Sabbah has been the International President of Pax Christi, a Catholic organization promoting peace. Sabbah resigned as Patriarch in 2008. He is currently the Grand Prior of the Chivalric Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, one of the knightly orders founded in 1099. Patriarch Sabbah is a co-author of the Kairos Palestine Document and believes in pluralism and equality in order to preserve the dignity of human beings.

First Sunday
in Advent

THE LAND AND JUSTICE

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac

The Palestinian Israeli conflict is, at its core, a struggle about land. The infamous and unjust Balfour declaration, where a colonizing power felt they have the right to control the destinies of peoples and lands, laid the foundation for one of the most severe injustices in our modern era. Israel was established on Palestinian land, and today the confiscation and occupation of Palestinian land by Israel continues under the protection of the international community. And Bethlehem is no stranger to this reality, causing those who lose their lands and are surrounded by walls and settlements to emigrate and look for a future for their families elsewhere, which endangers the presence of Christians in the land.

When the powerful take land from the weak, using the pretext of “security”, only to expand their empire and control of the natural resource – the land cries out for justice. And when the Bible is used by Israeli politicians and their Christian supporters, we must cry out and protest this grievous violation of the sacred texts.



JUSTICE MATTERS TO GOD!

The Bible speaks a lot about justice, and the theology of the land in the Bible captures this. No other sin in is tied in the Bible more directly with being expelled from the land than the sin of socio-economic injustice. Justice is emphasized in almost all the traditions. In Genesis 18:19, God says about Abraham:

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

Abraham was chosen for this reason: doing righteousness and justice, and this would bring the promise to fulfillment. In Deut. 16:19-20, justice is again portrayed as a prerequisite to staying in the land:

You shall not pervert justice... Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

The first five books in the Bible have a lot to say about the poor, the stranger, the sojourner, the widow, and



orphan. They are redefined, according to Brueggemann, as “brothers and sisters”. “It is one of the tasks that goes with covenanted land and keeps the land as covenanted reality: those who seem to have no claim must be honored and cared for”. This is because land is not “for self-security but for the brother and sister”.

Yet it was the “classical” prophets who elevated this issue above probably all other considerations and related it directly to the exile. As Chris Wright says: “The prophets simply would not allow Israel to get away with claiming the blessing and protection of the covenant relationship for their society while trampling on the socio-economic demands of that relationship.”

Amos is noticeable for his emphasizing social justice. His call to “let justice roll down like waters” (5:24) is followed by a warning of exile; “and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus” (5:27). Jeremiah makes a similar point:

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever (Jer. 7:5-7).

Justice matters! It matters to God! It mattered in biblical times and it matters today. It is in fact a central theme in the Bible. Yet sadly and in a strange way, justice is a missing component from the mission, teaching, theology and ministry of most churches and mission agencies. It is time to pause and ask deep and serious questions about how we understood the Bible and mission, and why we have ignored justice!

The question we ask today is this: is there justice in the land? Can we talk about peace in the Holy Land if justice is not addressed first?

In the context of the Israeli occupation to of Palestine and the Palestinians, injustice is tangible and real. It is manifested in the face of the refugee, the family whose land was confiscated, the worker who stands in at the checkpoint in the heat of the sun for hours, and the villagers who suffer the violence of the Israeli settlers. Injustice is apparent in the unequal distribution of wealth, water, and other natural resources and the laws and measurements that privilege one people over another.

As long as there is no justice, we cannot even begin talking about peace and coexistence. As Desmond Tutu wrote: “The sustainability of Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people has always been dependent on its ability to deliver justice to the Palestinians”.

Kairos Palestine emphasized justice as part of the mission of the church in the land: “Everything that happens in our land, everyone who lives there, all the pains and hopes, all the injustice and all the efforts to stop this injustice, are part and parcel of the prayer of our Church and the service of all her institutions” (KP 3.4) .

Moreover: “The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity. Our vocation as a living Church is to bear witness to the goodness of God and the dignity of human beings. We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries” (KP 3.4.2).

- See for example Ex. 22:21-24, 23:6, 9; Deut. 10:19; 15:7-11; 24:19-22.
- Brueggemann, Walter, 2002, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p. 61.
- *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- C.J.H. Wright, 2004, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 2004, p. 98
- See also Amos 6:6-7.
- See also Jer. 7:8-15; 21:12-14; 22:3-5; Isa. 5:12-13; Ezek. 16:49.
- Desmond Tutu, Letter to PC(USA). Internet link: http://new.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=274

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac:

Palestinian Christian pastor, theologian, writer, speaker, blogger, and more importantly, a husband and a father.


Munther wears many hats. He now pastors Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and is at the same time the Academic Dean of Bethlehem Bible. He is also the director of the highly acclaimed and influential Christ at the Checkpoint conferences, and is a board member of Kairos Palestine.

Munther is passionate about issues related to Palestinians and Palestinian Christians. He speaks locally and internationally on issues related to the theology of the land, Palestinian Christians, and Palestinian theology. He is the author of “From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land”.

Munther is a musician. He plays the guitar and the flute. He is also an avid sports fan, specially football (aka soccer!) and basketball (NBA).

Munther originally studied civil engineering in Birzeit. Realizing that numbers and construction sites are not his thing, he obtained a Master in Biblical Studies from Westminster Theological Seminary and then a PhD from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

Munther is married to Rudaina – an architect, and together they have two boys: Karam (4) and Zaid (2).



“Our presence in this land, as Christians and Muslims Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land, resonant with the connectedness of ant other people to the land it lives in. It was an injustice when we were driven out. The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our accounts and in our land. They tried to correct an injustice and the result was a new injustice.”

Kairos Palestine Document – A moment of Truth, Chapter 2.3.2

Second Sunday
in Advent

THE ONGOING NAKBA

BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights

After 70 years of Nakba, Palestinian people continue to be subjected to multiple policies implemented by Israel which leads to forced population transfer and displacement, and aim to control the maximum amount of land with the minimum number of Palestinians. This article aims to highlight this «ongoing Nakba» and the systematic policies of forcible transfer and displacement that Palestinians have been subjected to since 1917, with a special focus on Bethlehem area.

Overview of Historic Displacement of Palestinian People

During the British Mandate of Palestine (1922-1947), and subsequent enforcement of the Balfour Declaration, the British administration implemented multiple policies that facilitated Jewish illegal immigration to and settlement in Palestine. These included mass nationalization of immigrants, building colonies, confiscating Palestinian land, denationalization of Palestinians and expelling Palestinians from their homes and communities. These colonial policies continue to be deployed today.

As the result of aforementioned policies, between 1922 to the end of 1947, an estimated 100,000-150,000 Palestinians – nearly one-tenth of the Palestinian Arab population – were expelled, denationalized or forced to leave their homes. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were internally displaced as a result of; Zionist colonization, the eviction of tenant farmers, and punitive home demolitions by the British administration.

The unilateral declaration of the establishment of Israel in Tel Aviv on 14 May 1948 coincided with the withdrawal of British forces from Palestine and the

collapse of the UN partition plan. Between 750,000 and 900,000 Palestinians (making up between 55 and 66 percent of the total Palestinian population at the time) were forcibly displaced by the Zionist militias between the end of 1947 and early 1949. Ultimately, 85 percent of the indigenous Palestinian population, who had been living in Mandate Palestine that became the state of Israel, was displaced. Most refugees fled to what became the West Bank and Gaza Strip (22 percent of Mandate Palestine) or to neighboring Arab countries following the cessation of hostilities.

The second major displacement of Palestinians accrued on 1967 when Israel occupied the remainder of Mandate Palestine (the Jordanian-controlled West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip). Preparations for installing a military government in these regions had been ongoing since 1963. Many more Palestinians were forcibly removed from the West Bank on buses and trucks provided by the military. More than one-third (400,000 to 450,000) of the Palestinian population of the occupied Palestinian territory were displaced during this war. Nearly half of them (193,500) were refugees of 1948 and displaced for a second time, while 240,000 were displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the first time.

Since this time, Israel has deployed a number of policies whose aim is to continue ongoing transfer and displacement of Palestinians, either directly, or through the creation of a coercive environment that forces Palestinian families to leave. BADIL has identified nine main interrelated Israeli policies embodying many triggers and means, which constitute the pillars of a strategy aimed at forcibly displacing the Palestinian population in and beyond historical Mandate Palestine.

1. Denial of Residency

One of Israel's strategies to silently transfer Palestinians is through revocation of residency, and denial or hindrance of child registration, family unification or change of residence. Since the right to residency status is a condition for accessing a multitude of other rights, many people who hold no status under Israeli law are not eligible for health services, cannot enroll in schools, open bank accounts, work legally, own property, obtain a driving license or travel documents. In Jerusalem alone, more than 14,000 Palestinians lost their residency status and right to live in East Jerusalem since 1967.



2. Permit Regime

Israel installed a regime in which permits regulate and interfere with various facets of life of the occupied civilian populace, such as travel, work, development and transporting goods and assets. The permit regime exceeds a mere restriction on the freedom of movement and, instead, commonly results in the complete denial of access to land, work or health facilities. Palestinians are only allowed to build with a building permit issued by the Israeli authorities. Between 2008 and 2012, 97.7 percent of building permit applications in Area C submitted by Palestinians were rejected by the Israeli authorities.

3. Land confiscation and Denial of Use

This policy is pursued through the registration of land into categories. In addition to the actual confiscation of land, Israel employs different means to restrict or completely deny the use and access of land. Today, Israel occupies the entire surface of the occupied Palestinian territory (some 6,220 km²) and has confiscated or de facto annexed more than 3,456 km² (61 percent) of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) for the exclusive benefit of Jewish colonizers. In addition to land confiscation, numerous laws and policies in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and



Israel restrict Palestinian landowners' access to and use of their land.

4. **Discriminatory Zoning and Planning**

In order to contain and restrict the growing Palestinian population, Israel applies discriminatory zoning and planning policies. As a result, thousands of Palestinian families live in overcrowded and unsafe conditions because they are prevented from using their own land or accessing public land. Through a discriminatory and unjustifiable modification to the planning laws that were in place prior to the 1967 occupation, which is in itself a violation of International Humanitarian Law, Palestinians are prevented from participating in planning processes and in the development of successive Master Plans.

5. **Segregation**

The Israeli segregation policy exceeds the geographic separation; it targets the unity and national identity of the Palestinian people. This policy of categorization and isolation goes beyond the aim of separating Palestinians from Jewish-Israeli citizens; it divides Palestinians into geopolitical categories subjected to a hierarchical system of rights. On top of the legal division of Palestinians, Israel also divides the Palestinian population geographically in order to



isolate and suppress Palestinian communities while ensuring the supremacy of Israeli colonizers and privileges.

6. Denial of Access to Natural Resources and Services

Israel seeks to unlawfully control over and exploit the natural resources of the oPt through military, administrative and political mechanisms. Mandate Palestine is a territory rich in natural resources such as water, natural gas, fish stocks and mineral deposits, most of which are now outside the reach of Palestinian people. For example, Israel prohibits Palestinian use of wells and establishes colonies in the occupied Palestinian territory with privileged access to fresh water.



7. Denial of Refugee Right to Reparation (Return, Properties restitution and Compensation)

UN General Assembly Resolution 194, passed on 11 December 1948, resolves that the refugees should be allowed to return to their homes at the earliest practicable date and that compensation should be paid to those choosing not to return and for loss of damage or property. However, since 1948, Palestinian refugees are denied their right to return and citizenship, and thus Israel's legally and militarily enforced policy constitutes a violation of Palestinian individual and collective rights.

8. Suppression of Resistance

This policy includes systematic and mass military attacks/wars, invasions, unlawful killing, collective punishment, house demolition, closure, blockade, incarceration, torture and the suppression of the freedom of expression and assembly, as well as criminalizing acts of civil opposition or disobedience. This policy of suppression and criminalizing of resistance affects Palestinian communities and individuals create an unstable environment of fear and collective punishment.

9. Non-State Actors

This policy is carried out by colonizers, parastatal body/s organizations, or colonial private actors. It is supported either in the form of direct involvement or complicity by official Israeli bodies or highly-ranked officers.t It could be seen in wide ranges of illegal actions such as colonizers attacks, harassment of Palestinian properties, grab and/or privatization of Palestinian lands. For example, the Israel Land Administration Law of 2009 allows the privatization of lands (initially belong to Palestinians refugees and IDPs) 'owned' by the State of Israel, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Development Authority within both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, authorizing the sale of settlement units and areas confiscated for colony (settlement) construction from Palestinians to private Jewish owners.

Forcible Transfer Policies in Bethlehem governorate.

Bethlehem is one of the oldest Palestinian cities, located in the south of the West Bank between the cities of Hebron and Jerusalem, and home to the Nativity Church. Bethlehem is also home to 221,802 Palestinian residents.

The Bethlehem Governorate is host to three refugee camps.

Dheisheh Camp, in the south of Bethlehem, was created in 1949 and houses 14,919 registered refugees as of the end of 2014. In the northern part of Bethlehem, Aida and Beit Jibrin (al-Azzeh) camps were established in 1950. As of the end of 2014 there were 5,498 registered refugees living in Aida, and 2,408 in al-Azzeh. The demographic composition of refugees in Bethlehem encompasses a multitude of religious beliefs, including Islam and Christianity. Once the population of all three camps is combined, Palestinian refugees in Bethlehem governorate compose approximately 28% of the total population. Despite their presence, refugees living in Bethlehem are suffering from marginalization due to a lack of the most basic needs and services, cuts in aid provided by UNRWA, denial of their rights, as well as a protection gap that has left Palestinian refugees vulnerable, not only in Bethlehem, but everywhere.

There is about 62,000 refugees in Bethlehem district including those reside in the three camps. Generally, they fled from surrounding villages in Hebron and Jerusalem districts. Today, the number of Palestinian refugees living outside camps in Bethlehem is higher than those who live in refugee camps, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. However, the camps still host the densest population centers in the Governorate, and the lack of access to housing has triggered a number of families to leave the camp. UNRWA estimates that the population density in these camps is: 45,454 people per square kilometer in Dheisheh, 77,464 per sq km in Aida, and 92,592 per sq km in al-Azzeh.

As with other Palestinian cities in West Bank and Gaza strip, forcible transfer and displacement of Palestinians in Bethlehem is ongoing as a result of a combination of all the aforementioned Israeli policies. Many villages surrounding Bethlehem are currently at high risk of ongoing forcible transfer, which combined with their location - along the annexation and separation wall, and being encroached upon due to expanding illegal colonies - makes them vulnerable to eventual annexation to Israel.

Such villages include: al-Walajah, Wadi Fukin, Husan, and Beit Scaria whose residents are particularly subject to land confiscation and denial of access, permit regimes, colonizer violence with complicity of the Israeli forces, home demolitions, and lack of access to natural resources and services.

Bethlehem is also suffering from the expansion of colonies as it is witnessing the largest concentration of Israeli colonizers in one area within the West Bank. The Gush Etzion colonial bloc, major part of it is built over the land of the eastern and southern Palestinian villages of Bethlehem consists of 36 colonies, including a number of outposts, and industrial areas surrounding Bethlehem and Hebron. This clearly exemplifies the ongoing suffering and displacement of Palestinians in Bethlehem due to the expansion of colonies. It is currently estimated that there are around 70,000 Israeli colonizers within the bloc, and this number is increasing exponentially each day. The Etzion colonial bloc continues to expand in order to annex this land along with Jerusalem, as proposed by the Israeli Greater Jerusalem plans. Colonies' expansion and the other aforementioned Israeli forcible transfer policies are amplifying a coercive environment that results in local residents to become forcibly displaced.

BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights is an independent, human rights non-profit organization committed to protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons. Our vision, mission, programs and relationships are defined by our Palestinian identity and the principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. We seek to advance the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people on this basis.

PEACE BE ON YOU FROM BETHLEHEM, THE HOLY LAND,

*His Eminence Archbishop Atallah Hanna,
Archbishop of Sebastia- Jerusalem*

At Christmas we recall He who came for our salvation, the salvation of all humanity, to move it from an era of darkness, sin and death to an era of light, blessing, and salvation. Lord Jesus Christ came to this world to open a new page in human history, and to invite all people to a life full of goodness, sacrifice, and dedication in the service of man. With his birth, he taught us to be humble and showed us that man's greatness lies in his humility, and in the spiritual and human message he or she carries. The more modest the man, the greater he becomes. This humility was embodied in the birth of the Savior in a Bethlehem stable and all the events he underwent up to his agony, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection.

Lord Jesus taught us to always take the side of the oppressed. As he traveled from one place to another, he always tended the poor, needy, sick and aggrieved to fill them with hope, attend to their wounds, and console them with his words from heaven.

The situation that the Palestinians have been living under for many years is tragic. The injustices that our people have been subjected to are so numerous; so many are aggrieved, suffering, and bereaved people who have lost their loved ones; so many are also suffering behind bars. The Palestinian problem is a bleeding wound; it is the bleeding of all of us as the sons and daughters of the one Palestinian people. As Palestinian Christians who believe in the values of the Gospel, its mission, and presence in our world, we should always call for freedom for our Palestinian people. Our bias should always be in favor of this people who have been afflicted by great injustice,

whose rights were usurped, and who have been subjected to ethnic cleansing, displacement, and uprooting from this holy land.

It is our duty to support our Palestinian people and to show solidarity, particularly with refugees and distressed Palestinians who were forcibly uprooted and displaced from their homeland, those who dwell in refugee camps while their hearts beat with love and affiliation for their homeland. We must be with them, pray for them, and express our support for them in practical means. We must advocate for their right to return to their homeland from which they were displaced and uprooted.

The Kairos Palestine document is a Christian Palestinian national message from the heart of suffering which aims to convey the Palestinian national voice throughout the world. We hope our message will be heard as our people are still under occupation; we still live with the consequences of catastrophes and setbacks that all of us Palestinians have been subjected to, and that have created many human disasters. At Christmas we hope our message will reach out to all Christian churches in the world, and to all nations of the earth, to convey the need to think about the land of Christmas, this holy spot of the world where the Savior came into being and from which the light of faith emanated to dispel the darkness of this universe. From the land of Birth, we say to the nations of the world: Look at our



people, look at our agonies, sufferings, and wounds! Look at the Palestinian refugees and distressed scattered in various parts of the world and in refugee camps. Look at this holy land, support our people, and call for justice to be served in this land through the removal of all forms of the occupation, so that our people can enjoy the freedom that they deserve and for which they have made so many



sacrifices.

As Palestinian Christians, our message from this holy land is that we will not abandon our affiliation to the values of the gospel of love. We are committed to our faith and proud that we are the sons and daughters of the first church named by Saint John of Damascus as the mother of churches. It was the first church established in this holy land from which the Christian mission was launched to all parts of the world. We would also like to say that we will not abandon our belonging to our homeland. Palestine is our homeland and our cause. It is the duty of all of us to defend this cause, which we consider the most just in modern human history.

During the glorious Christmas period, we pray to God to be kind to us, to be merciful to our country, and to grant us His justice and peace. The blessings that we wish for Palestine are also for all the peoples of this earth,

especially in the Arab world where a culture of death, hatred, violence, and terrorism is emerging. We hope that peace can be achieved in the Arab world and the machine of death, violence and terrorism that is claiming the lives of innocents will halt so that a culture of love, dialogue, and convergence between man and brother man will prevail.

**PEACE BE ON YOU FROM BETHLEHEM,
THE HOLY LAND,
AND FROM THE BLESSED LAND OF PALESTINE.
WISHING A MERRY AND GLORIOUS CHRISTMAS**

Bishop Atallah Hanna Bishop Hanna was born on 6/11/1965 in the town of Al Rama in the Upper Galilee. After finishing high school in Al Rama in 1983 he joined the Orthodox Seminary in Jerusalem. In 1984 he left to Thessaloniki in Greece where he studied Greek and then joined the College of Theology at the Thessaloniki University from which he graduated with distinction in 1990. He was ordained a monk in 1990 at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem. He contributed to the development of the unified curriculum for Christian religion teaching at Palestinian schools. Archbishop Hanna participated in many local, regional and international conferences and advocated for the Palestinian question in all forums. He is a member of many committees and organizations in addition to his membership in several Christian and ecumenical institutions. He played a role in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. He was elected unanimously as the Archbishop of Sebastia in 2005.

“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?”

Kairos Palestine Document – A moment of Truth, Chapter 1.1.6

Third Sunday
in Advent

CHRISTMAS: THE REAL STORY

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

I was struck by the results of a recent study done in Britain and published under the title “Doing Good: A Future for Christianity in the 21st Century.” In this study, over 1000 kids between the ages of five to twelve years old were asked several questions about Christmas and the answers were shocking: 52% of the kids thought that Christmas is Santa’s birthday; 27% answered that Jesus was born in a church; 20% thought that Jesus is a name of a soccer player with Chelsea; and 35% were certain that he was born in the South Pole.

It seems that the more trees lit at Christmas time, the more streets decorated and the more food consumed, the less the Christmas story is known and the further we are from its true meaning.

The Christmas gospel has nothing to do with what we see around us at Christmas time, but has a lot to do with what we see around us all year round. The Christmas story mirrors our story as Palestinians, but it also mirrors the world story in this day and age.



The setting of the Christmas story is so real and has nothing to do with the glitter and glamour of Christmas time. It is set in Occupied Palestine, a country occupied by the Romans. A young couple from Nazareth is forced by the occupiers to go and register. Registration is a mean to control those occupied, control their movement, and control their income and taxes. And so Joseph and Mary had to come to Bethlehem to get their “magnetic cards”. Then we hear from the Magi, who came from the East to visit the child of Bethlehem and to adore him but were stopped at the borders by Herod’s security guards and were harassed and interrogated for the simple reason that they told the truth, in that they are going to Bethlehem. Then we hear of massacres of innocent children dying for no reason except that Herod wanted to terrorize Palestine’s population and to spread fear. And then we see the young family seeking refuge in Egypt; they became refugees on the way in order to escape Herod’s terror.

The Christmas story is a Palestinian story par excellence, but it is also a mirror of our world today. The voice that was heard in Ramah is echoing today in Gaza, Syria and Iraq. Rachel is weeping her children and she refuses to be consoled because they are no more. It is so difficult to be consoled after living for 50 years under continuous occupation with no end in sight. It is so difficult to be comforted if you are a refugee swollen by the high seas on the way to the land of promise. It is so difficult to be consoled if you live in a world where terror seems to be out of control and strikes everywhere.

The Christmas story is a mirror of our story. There we find our reality as ugly as it is without any camouflage. In that story we see ourselves in a clear mirror without any mask. In that story we see the damage that was done to the humankind.

A few days ago a journalist asked me: if the Christmas story is a mirror of our painful reality, where then is the gospel in it? Where is the good news? Where is the hope?

The gospel is this: When the fullness of time came, the time for the Word to be incarnated, God did not choose Rome or Athens for Christ to be born at; He chose occupied Bethlehem. He chose to be one of those oppressed; He chose to be one of those terrorized. When the fullness of time came, God so loved this world with all its ugliness and did not shy away from it. God chose to encounter this world with all its might and terror. He chose to challenge Herod with the face of an innocent child. God did not leave this world to its misery and pain but embraced it with both hands and pulled it to his heart. And so in the midst of the Roman occupation and oppression, the people of Palestine heard the good news of “Do not be afraid, for unto you is born a savior, Christ the Lord.” And in the darkest hours of the long night, the shepherds saw great light and heard the angels giving God the glory. This is the crux of the Christmas story.

But this is not the end of the story. If God did not shy away from incarnating in this world, we cannot shy away either. On the contrary, his embrace to our world inspires us to engage. Why stay in Palestine if we have options to go somewhere else? Because God chose this place and we do so too. We do not surrender to the Occupation. Why stay in Aleppo? I asked a friend there. Her answer was: because I care for this city and I care for this community. It is because we cannot surrender to terror. But we cannot react to terror through fascism either, because this is contrary to the spirit of Christmas. We do not allow the terror in all of its shapes and names to carry us away to fear and hate, but we commend ourselves to that story of Jesus to instill in us this will to resist by witnessing for the light that cast away darkness and life that is stronger than death.

Our world today does not need more plastic Christmas trees but is in dire need to be inspired by the child of Bethlehem that resisted Herod with his message “Do not be afraid.” Our planet today is in dire need for people who do not shy away but engage and act. Our communities are in dire need for citizens who commit themselves to stay with their suffering communities and to serve. Our young

people are in dire need for role models who embody the gospel in the midst of all blogs and posts that disseminate hate. The Christmas story is an invitation to renew our commitment to our world that God loved so much that He sent his Word to incarnate in it at times similar like these.

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

is the founder and President of Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem. He served as a Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem from June 1987 till May 2017. And was the president of the Synod of the ELCJHL from 2011 till 2017. The most widely published Palestinian theologian to date, author of 18 books.

His books and numerous articles have been translated into eleven languages.

The 55 year-old multilingual contextual theologian received many prizes for his 'distinguished service to the church and the society'; the prestigious Wittenberg Award from the Luther Center in DC (2003). The well-known German Peace Award of Aachen in 2007. And the German Media Prize in 2012. And the latest was the prestigious Tolerance Ring Award in Cologne-Germany, November, 2017.

The work of Dr. Raheb has received wide media attention from major international media outlets and networks including CNN, ABC, CBS, 60 Minutes, BBC, ARD, ZDF, DW, BR, Premiere, Raiuno, Stern, The Economist, Newsweek, and Vanity Fair.

Dr. Raheb holds a Doctorate in Theology from the Philipps University at Marburg, Germany. For more information, please visit www.mitriraheb.org

“We say that our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy. Seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator to end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence.”

Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 4.2.3

Fourth Sunday
in Advent

THE CONTINUES HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

THE CASE OF AL-WALAJEH

By: Manal Hazzan –Abusinni

Autumn, often associated with Melancholy, is a vivid season in Palestine, for it is the season of olive picking. The vast green olive groves come to life with laborers, young and old, men and women, immersed in picking and pressing olives to produce oil.

One exception to this lively scene is the village of Walajeh. Situated to the South-west of Jerusalem on the hills of Bethlehem, the Majority of its lands remain within a stone throw from their original Palestinian owners, seen but not reached.



During the 1948 Nakba, all of its inhabitants were displaced from their original village. Some were settled in refugee camps, while others moved to Jordan and Lebanon. The few who managed to remain, settled on the West Bank side of the 1949 armistice line (Green Line), where some villagers had owned agricultural land.

This location, approximately one mile from the original village, became the site of Al-Walajeh known to us today. The land which remained in the newly established Israel was seized to establish the Jewish agricultural “moshav” of Aminadav.

Later, following the 1967 occupation, the new village came under Israeli occupation, and with the illegal annexation of the occupied territories of East Jerusalem, one third of the lands constituting the new Walajeh became under Israeli annexation and Jurisdiction, within the expanded borders of the Jerusalem municipality.

Contrary to the rest of the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, the residents of Walajeh were never granted an Israeli Residency. The few who have it obtained it through family unification.

After illegally annexing East Jerusalem, Israel conducted a population census following which a residency status, rather than full citizenship, was granted to all Palestinians which were found residing in the newly annexed territory. This status carries an array of legal problems; the most prominent is the ability of the state to revoke it according to its laws, but contrary to international law norms. By that the state renders the resident stateless and stripped from basic human rights on all civil, social and economic levels.

Not granting Al Walajeh residents this status meant that they couldn't conduct a life in Jerusalem, although they were living within its borders, as they held no legal status enabling them to study, work or more importantly, move freely in Jerusalem. Therefore, they resorted to conducting

a life in the West Bank, relying on Bethlehem and Beit Jala as the next major cities for work, education, health and all other aspects of life.

The disconnection from their lands and from Jerusalem was soon to be followed by more legal complications, as these residents were considered illegal aliens in their own homes.

Their land was now Israeli, while their residency status remained Palestinian.

Night raids by the Israeli Border Police followed, and people were reportedly expelled from their houses on the false accusation of staying illegally in Israel, although they were staying in their own homes, and with their own families.

Their attempts to obtain a Jerusalem residency were denied by the Israeli court.

Those infamous residency policies serve a clear purpose: Obtaining a Jewish demographic domination in Jerusalem through the silent, yet forcible transfer of Palestinians from their lands and homes.

For those residents who could not be expelled by residency policies, Israel applies planning policies otherwise known as home demolitions, where it plays the illegality card also to buildings.

In the late 90's the villagers organized and prepared an outline plan to protect the existing buildings, and to enable the development of the village. The plans were submitted to the relevant Israeli officials, to be stalled during the second Intifada, and eventually rejected in 2009 (Bt'selem) contending the village lies within a green area that should be protected.

Residency policies are often combined with land expropriation policies, including planning policies, which



serve the second part of the equation: Maintaining a geographical continuation of the Jewish settlements of a Greater Jerusalem.

In the case of Walajeh, it is the neighboring settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo. Both established on lands unlawfully confiscated by Israel from its Palestinian owners, the residents of Walajeh.

In recent years and months, many plans were initiated and approved by Israel to further expand the settlement of Gilo, towards Walajeh and the Cremisan area, the last of those plans was declared last July, where 3000 housing units are to be added to Gilo on the South- Eastern slopes facing Walajeh. Two other plans for expanding the settlement of Gilo were deposited over the last years (2011, 2012) adding 770 housing units over an area of 143 Donoms, while Walajeh on the other side of the same valley was being

strangled together with the Cremisan area, by another means expropriation: the Separation wall.

While the international court of justice (ICJ) deemed the separation wall illegal in its advisory opinion, and under international humanitarian and human rights law, and called for Israel to “make reparation for all damage caused by the construction of the wall...” and “dismantle forthwith those parts of that structure situated within the Occupied Palestinian Territory” Israeli authorities, including the its High Court of Justice continue to ignore it.

It is under the guise of security that Israel continues to build the separation wall, which today surrounds Walajeh and turns it into an open prison.

It is enough to read about the Hajajleh Family house to grasp the cruelty of the occupation, the irrelevance of the high court on the one hand, and the resilience of the Palestinian villagers, on the other.

The family house is cut by the wall from the rest of the village and can be reached only through a concrete tunnel, wide enough for one vehicle to pass, a military gate within, a key for the gate with family to open. Family visits to be coordinated with Israeli authorities, the passage of building materials too.

While the declared reason is always security, the real reason remains the appropriation of the land, as much of it as possible.

No other reason can explain the recent declaration (2016) of the lands of Walajeh, remaining behind the wall, as an Israeli national park – Ein Hannya, or the settlement expansion that keeps crawling towards Walajeh, Cremisan and Beit Jala, which are claimed to be the source of security threat the wall is supposed to fend.

It is admirable that in spite of all the persecution they face and the ongoing state force applied against them, the residents of Walajeh remain steadfast in their land, strong

in their belief and hope for a greater justice to come. After all it is in Walajeh that the most ancient olive tree in Palestine is rooted. Come and see.

As for the rest of us as we approach the end of the 50th year of occupation, our efforts on all levels, locally and internationally, should be directed to abolishing this unjust occupation and its associated regimes, or else, the plight of the residents of Walajeh would remain but a cry in the wilderness.

Manal Hazzan Abu Sinni: A Nazareth born human rights lawyer with 16 years' experience. She is also a translator in three languages. She is a specialist in International and Human rights law LLB from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and obtained LLM from UCL – London. She worked with Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights Organizations and served as the head of the legal department for 6 years at St. Yves – The Catholic center for Human Rights in the Old City of Jerusalem. Today, she owns her own legal Practice in Jerusalem, and serves as a legal consultant. She serves on the board of several organizations: Kairos Palestine, YWCA Jerusalem, Emek Shaveh – archeology in the Shadow of the Conflict, Helen Keller School for the visually impaired (2015). She lives with her family in Jerusalem

**“Get up” ... “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.”
(Matthew 2:13)**

«I no longer doubt that God, whom we knew in Palestine, has come out of it too, and that he is a refugee, whence... I do not know»

(Ghassan Kanafani in: The Land of the Sad Orange)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Holy Family could not live a normal life, to raise the young Child in an atmosphere of safety and peace. «For Herod is going to search for the child to kill him”. This is what the angel told Joseph, asking him to leave his country and his home to save his family, and find a safe place for it. Even the Holy Family is not spared from displacement and homelessness, because Herod wants to protect his throne by killing the children of Bethlehem.

Herod was looking for power and wanted to impose his domination by force. His love for the throne led him to sacrifice the children of Bethlehem when he heard that a “King” was born there. Herod died; however, the spirit of Herod remained. Some still believe that they can by force control the fate of men and sacrifice them on the altar of their power. There is always «Herod» who orders the massacre of children, and children are still fleeing and displaced.

Christ did not come to become a king like other kings, «His kingdom is not of this world» and He is not like the people of this world. He came to join us in our refuge, and to become himself a refugee. «He lived like us in everything,» even in the experience of refuge, He became like us, and one of us. As the Child's asylum was temporary, we are confident that our displacement, no matter how long, is also temporary. Our Lord is a righteous loving God. He

does not want to see injustice continues to his children, and cannot allow the tragedy to continue for his loved ones.

Heavenly Father, Creator of humankind and our savior... You wanted your son to participate in our human life with all its volatility and grief, to become a refugee and suffer displacement, cold and far from home. Look at your children the refugees, who suffer displacement and alienation. They suffer the hardships borne by the child Jesus with his family when he migrated to Egypt. Herod wanted to kill the Child, so Joseph preferred to take Him and his mother and migrate to a place where he could secure a better life for his family. This is what many have done here in this land. They have been displaced, left their homes, not to escape hardship and difficulties, but to survive and seek a safe life for their children.

We put in your hands our brothers and sisters the refugees, in order to show them your tenderness and parental love. We put in your hands their pain of alienation from their homeland, their hopes and dreams to return and live in security. Send your angel, as you sent him to the righteous Joseph to say to them «Get up ... take the child and his mother and go to your land.» Get up and return to your land, the land of your ancestors. There I want you to be, not to fight and combat, but to sow your land and raise your children. We will worship you in spirit and Justice, so that the



land will become a place where we worship you, not as an idol that we venerate in your name. Because the land and all that its contents is for you and we are entrusted only to plant and take care of it.

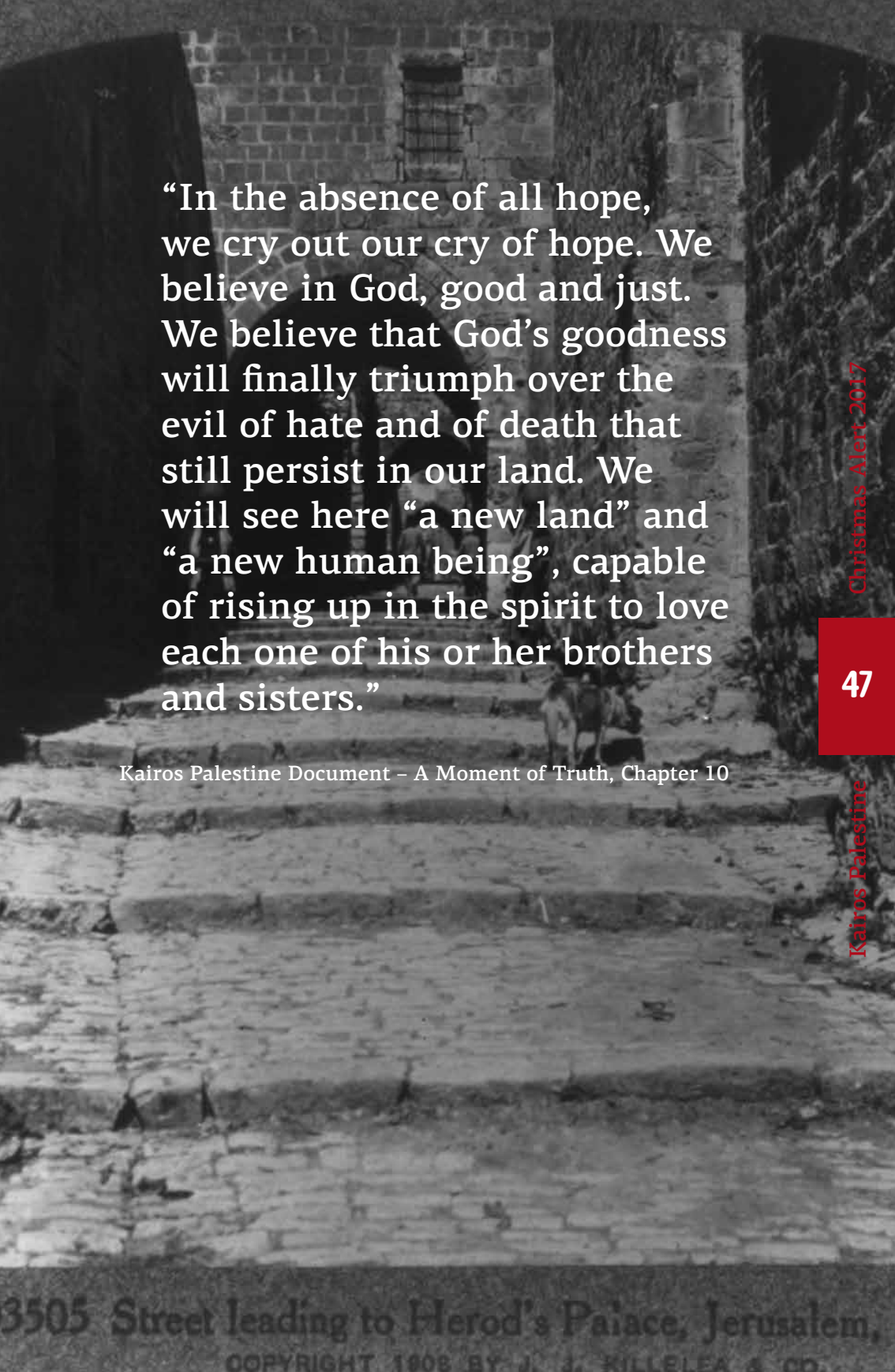
O God of Mercy, have mercy for our fellow refugees, be with them, so that they can return safely to their homes, and participate in the making of peace, the peace that you give and which cannot be done without you. Peace based on justice for all those subjected to injustice. Peace as the fruit of justice and basis of reconciliation. Amen

Professor of Theology at the Latin Patriarchal Seminary (1998 – 2017) and at Bethlehem University (2000-2017). Chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies at Bethlehem University (2003 – 2013); Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Bethlehem University (2008 – 2013). Rector of the Latin Patriarchate Seminary (2013 – 2017). Pastor of the Holy Family Church in Ramallah. Co-writer of the “Kairos Palestine document”.

Fr. Jamal Khader

A priest at the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, ordained in 1988. After several years of pastoral experience, he continued his studies in Rome, at the Pontifical Gregorian University (1994-1998), where he obtained his PHD in Dogmatic Theology.





“In the absence of all hope,
we cry out our cry of hope. We
believe in God, good and just.
We believe that God’s goodness
will finally triumph over the
evil of hate and of death that
still persist in our land. We
will see here “a new land” and
“a new human being”, capable
of rising up in the spirit to love
each one of his or her brothers
and sisters.”

Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 10

EPILOGUE

AS WE ARE PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR CHRISTMAS... PLEASE REMEMBER THE PALESTINIANS

By Rifat Odeh Kassir

Oh God, God of all creation, we long for your justice, we thirst for your water and hope for your love. Give us the power to repent and to be your faithful and courageous servants and give us from your heavenly blessings to be steadfast and stand against evil. Grant us the strength to walk with You, to be born again to glorify Your name. May we open our eyes to see the suffering of Your people and become solid in our faith to stand by them with solidarity in faith, hope and Love.

The plight of Palestinian People today is a severe and critical crisis of particular urgency. We are living today in a particularly dark moment of Palestinian reality, a moment that has itself emerged from many dark decades of Palestinian history. The Palestinian people have experienced dispossession, dispersion, Apartheid, manipulation, and control at the hands of foreign regime for the past seven decades and have endured direct military occupation and Apartheid for five decades. The endless political negotiations have reached a dead-end, and there is no indication that this “peace process” would advance.

Our homeland was divided in two in 1948 where Israel was created by force on 78% of Palestine and more than three-quarters of our population then was expelled and became scattered refugees across the globe without any solid international recognition of their right of return. Since the Israeli military occupation in 1967 to the rest of Palestine, the oppression of Palestinians continues unabated. The killing and maiming of the Palestinian people continues unabated. Our land is confiscated on a daily basis and illegal Jewish settlements are built upon it. Roads have been constructed exclusively for the use of settlers and the construction of the separation

wall has confiscated more than 40% of what left from our land. The siege of Gaza continues. Palestinian homes are continually demolished, Palestinian Jerusalem ID cards are revoked and are denied residency in Jerusalem. Palestinians are subjected to continuous racism, movement restrictions, limited access to health services and jobs and educational opportunities, arbitrary arrests, and host of daily humiliations. Palestinian prisoners, among them women and children, still endure severe conditions, legal violations, and ill-treatment. More than six million refugees still await their return, many of them still living harsh conditions in refugee camps. Palestinians inside Israel still face incessant discrimination and Apartheid, without any reparations for the historical crimes committed against them.

The situation isn't getting better. Indeed, it's only getting worse. The National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine (NCCOP) wrote on June 12th 2017 an open letter to the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement saying: "Things are beyond urgent. We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. The current status-





quo is unsustainable. This could be our last chance to achieve a just peace. As a Palestinian Christian community, this could be our last opportunity to save the Christian presence in this land”.

It is not enough to understand the current critical situation that shapes the life of the Palestinian people today, but we need to work and struggle hard to change it. This way we might help finding a peaceful solution to this prolonged military occupation, dispossession, discrimination and Apartheid. Today, even more than at any other moment, you; our sisters and brothers around the world, have the opportunity and the obligation to demand justice. By refusing to condone and perpetuate Israeli impunity, by taking a clear and strong position against any theology or Christian group that justifies occupation, by defending the Palestinian rights and duty to resist the occupation, by speaking in support of economic, sport, cultural and academic measures that pressure Israel to comply with international law and UN resolution and grant Palestinians their rights.

In this advent season, we emphasize that we, as people of hope, we will never get into despair and our hope in our Risen God is great and unchallenged but we need you, Christian brothers and sisters, now more than ever. We need your costly solidarity and urge you to hear and respond to our call.

Time is running out. But with your strength, solidarity, commitment, and compassion; with your bold, public, united refusal to accept any outcome other than an end to oppression – together, we can turn the tide. We can finally live in peace with justice, the peace that all peoples aspire to, Peace that was announced in Bethlehem.

And as we wrote in Kairos document: in chapter 6.1 “Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you willing and able to work with us to restore our freedom? Our freedom will be the only sustainable foundation for both Palestinians and Israelis to live in love, justice, peace and security”.

From Bethlehem where peace was announced, I wish you all a Merry Christmas.

Rifat Odeh Kassis: Throughout his career, he has been advocating and actively campaigning for the effective application of international human rights and humanitarian law in Palestine, through various professional and voluntary positions. In 1988 he started working in the East Jerusalem YMCA as director for its rehabilitation programs in the West Bank. In 1995 he co-founded the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG). In 1991 he founded the first Palestinian independent Child Rights’ NGO-a national section of the Geneva-based global child rights’ movement, Defense for Children International (DCI), later serving as a president of DCI-Palestine and later becoming the president of the DCI movement at the global level.



Kairos Palestine A moment of truth

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