



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

November 8, 2012

Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C. Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

Recent actions by Palestinians and Israelis perpetuate an unsustainable status quo that is profoundly dangerous to both peoples. Both sides are undermining the possibility of a two-state solution to the conflict—a secure and recognized Israel living in peace alongside a viable and independent Palestinian state.

The recent barrage of rocket attacks from Gaza into Southern Israel represents a continuing pattern of morally unjustifiable uses of indiscriminate force against civilians. They spread fear among Israeli families and damage the Palestinian cause by undercutting the trust necessary for negotiations.

Israeli occupation and security policies are also undermining the possibility of a two-state solution. A recent statement of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land expressing great concern over the route of the Israeli-Palestinian separation barrier in the Cremisan Valley is a vivid case in point.

The State of Israel plans to re-route the separation barrier through the Cremisan Valley, which will harm 58 Christian families whose livelihoods and living conditions depend on these lands. Proceeding with this plan will cut families off from agricultural and recreational lands, other family members, water sources, and schools – including depriving Christian Palestinian youth of fellowship with their peers. In solidarity with our brother bishops in the Holy Land, we oppose re-routing the separation wall in the Cremisan Valley and ask the State Department to raise the concerns expressed by the bishops of the Holy Land in the enclosed statement with the government of Israel.

The Cremisan Valley situation is a microcosm of a protracted pattern that has serious implications for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As the wall moves and constricts more and more communities in the West Bank, the possibility of a future resolution becomes less likely. Moving the wall and disassociating Palestinian families from their lands and livelihoods will incite more resentment against the State of Israel among residents of the West Bank, not less, increasing the frustrations that can lead to violence. Such policies put Israeli citizens at risk and weaken initiatives for reconciliation and peace.

USCCB supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an end of indefensible rocket attacks in southern Israel, and a reversal of Israeli policies, like those proposed in the Cremisan Valley, that undermine a just resolution of the conflict.

Letter to Secretary Clinton
November 8, 2012
Page 2

Our Conference reiterates its call for strong U.S. leadership that holds both parties accountable for building a just and lasting peace. Palestinians must end violence, improve security and strengthen governance. Israelis must stop settlement expansion in the West Bank, ease residency requirements that separate families, cease home demolitions in East Jerusalem in order to protect Palestinian families, allow movement of people and goods in the West Bank, and review the route of the security barrier for its impact on Palestinian lives and livelihoods, including in the Cremisan Valley. Leaders on both sides must give Israelis and Palestinians hope for a different future free of fear and full of promise.

Sincerely yours,

+ 

Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Encl.

PRESS RELEASE

The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land condemns the planned route of the separation wall in Cremisan valley. The issued seizure orders affect Al Walaja village and 58 Christian families from Beit Jala whose livelihood depends on this land. Furthermore, the two local Salesian congregations located there would be negatively affected in their Mission work towards the local community.

Separated from Cremisan valley, the local community will lose one of its last big agricultural and recreational areas as well as a crucial water sources for farmers. In fact, Cremisan green area is the main lung through which the population of Bethlehem can breathe. Besides, the 450 children attending the Salesian Sisters School will have to go to a prison-like school, surrounded by military barriers and check-points.

On July 9, 2004, the International Court of Justice found the separation wall illegal under international law. The Assembly of Catholic Bishops has the same stand. We therefore instructed the Society of St. Yves to file a case against the Military Authorities.

The planned construction of the wall will put more pressure on the remaining Christians living in Bethlehem. Without an income and a future for their children, more people will make the decision to leave the Holy Land.

The Catholic Ordinaries deny the existence of any explicit or implicit agreement between the Vatican, the local church and Israeli authorities regarding the construction of this illegal wall and therefore strongly call on the State of Israel to restrain from its plan to separate Cremisan valley from Bethlehem.

+ **Fouad TWAL**

Patriarch of Jerusalem for Latins
President A.C.O.H.L.

+ **Elias CHACOUR**

Greek Catholic Melkite Archbishop of Akka
Vice president A.C.O.H.L.

+ **Giorgio LINGUA**

Apostolic Nuncio for Jordan

Msgr **Waldemar SOMMERTAG**

Chargé d'Affaires of the
Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem &
Palestine
Apostolic Nunciature for Israel & Cyprus

+ **Michel SABBAH**

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem emeritus

+ **Yaser Al-AYYASH**

Greek Cath. Melkite Archbishop
of Petra and Philadelphia (Amman)

+ **Joseph SOUEIF**

Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus

+ **Mussa AL-HAGE**

Maronite Archbishop of Haifa & Holy Land
Maronite Exarch of Jerusalem

+ **Boutros MOUALLEM**

Greek Cath. Melkite Arch.of Akka emeritus

+ **Gregoire Pierre MELKI**
Syrian Catholic Exarch of Jerusalem

+ **Joseph Jules ZEREY**
Greek Melkite Patriarchal Vicar of
Jerusalem

+ **Maroun LAHHAM**
Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Jordan

+ **Giacinto-Boulos MARCUZZO**
Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Israel

+ **William SHOMALI**
Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Jerusalem &
Palestine

+ **Kamal-Hanna BATHISH**
Latin Patriarchal Vicar general emeritus

+ **Selim SAYEGH**
Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Jordan emeritus

Msgr. **Joseph KELEKIAN**
Armenian Catholic Exarch of Jerusalem

Fr. **Pierbattista PIZZABALLA**, OFM
Custos of the Holy Land

Fr. **Evencio HERRERA DIAZ**, OFM.
Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Cyprus

Fr. **David NEUHAUS**, S.J.
Patriar. Vicar Hebrew speaking Vicariate

Fr. **Raymond MOUSSALLI**
Chaldean Patriarchal Vicar for Jordan

Fr. **Pietro FELET**, scj
Secretary General