



Holy Land Co-ordination: Christians essential to Jerusalem's identity

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27 May 2022 - At the end of a visit to Israel and Palestine, The Holy Land Co-ordination 2022 upholds the rightful place of the Christian community in Jerusalem's identity. The Co-ordination of Bishops' Conferences in Support of the Church in the Holy Land, better known as the Holy Land Co-ordination (HLC), has released a statement following the conclusion of their annual solidarity pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine.

Jerusalem: a universal city

In the communiqué following the visit, which took place from the 21-26 May, the bishops stress that "Jerusalem is a Jewish city, a Christian city, a Muslim city. It must remain a common patrimony and never become the exclusive monopoly of any one religion."

They underline that "the Christian community is essential to Jerusalem's identity, both now and for the future." Yet, they say, "its continued presence is threatened by occupation and injustice."

The Co-ordination group says that it came to the city to pray and "to meet and pray with our sisters and brothers, mindful of Patriarch Pizzaballa's message that it is our right and duty as Christians to uphold the city's openness and universality."

Challenges face Christians

However, it also notes that many of the people they encountered "are facing violence and intimidation by settler groups, restrictions on their freedom of movement, or separation from their families because of the status they are assigned."

During their visit, the bishops went to the Jerusalem suburb of Beit Hanina, to offer their personal condolences to the family of Christian Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh.

The Al Jazeera veteran reporter was shot dead on 11 May while covering an Israeli army raid in the occupied West Bank.

"We experienced the deep sorrow and anger felt by local Christians at the killing of Palestinian Catholic journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and the shameful attack on mourners at her funeral," the statement reads.

The communiqué also says it shares the concerns expressed by the Christian community about "unilateral restrictions on freedom of worship during Easter, imposed by the Israeli police."

Hardship and poverty

The bishops highlight the poverty they witnessed during their visit, which they say, has been compounded by the pandemic.

Another area of concern is the absence of pilgrims during the past two years, which has devastated livelihoods, including among Jerusalem's Christian community, leaving some families struggling to afford housing, food, or other essentials.

However, despite these challenges, the bishops point to signs of hope.

"We visited Christian organisations taking responsibility for the wellbeing of their community and wider society. They are working tirelessly to alleviate hardship and improve lives. We met young people who, despite facing daily violations of their fundamental human rights, refuse to be the last generation of Christians in the city."

Speaking to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, Bishop Declan Lang, Chair of the Holy Land Co-ordination, said, "signs of hope are: the Christian community is a very small community but it excels at its activities, especially at charity towards people, social welfare, and education. We pull more than our weight, and that's always a sign of hope, and that also the Christian community has pledged really to this sacred place, the place of dialogue and peace."

Solidarity

As pilgrims return once more to the region, the Bishops Co-ordination is calling on them to support Christians in Jerusalem and throughout the Holy Land.

"It is essential that all pilgrims understand and engage with the reality of life for the Christian community here. A true Holy Land pilgrimage should be a journey of faith, encounter, and solidarity."

Statement

The text of the statement [can be found here](#).

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