Bishops of Holy Land Coordination release statement after their visit to Israel and Palestine

01.02.2019

STATEMENT – The Holy Land Coordination stands in solidarity with all Christians in Israel and Palestine. Our ongoing advocacy for a just peace is informed by an annual pilgrimage to meet with our sisters and brothers, listen to them, and witness the challenges they face. This year our focus has been those Christians who live in the state of Israel.

Standing in solidarity with Israel's Christians

Throughout our visit we have experienced how there are Israeli citizens from many different backgrounds who coexist and work together for the Common Good of their society. We recognize that Israel was founded on the stated principles of equality between all its citizens. This urgently needs to become the lived reality.

Israel's Christians wish to live as full citizens, with their rights recognized in a plural and democratic society. We have seen the vital contribution that they make especially through schools, hospitals, involvement in public life and attempting to build bridges between different faiths.

Yet it is clear that at the same time they face profound difficulties across all aspects of their lives. We have heard that, along with other Palestinian Arab citizens and migrants living in Israel, many Christians find themselves systematically discriminated against and marginalized.

Those we met expressed particular concern about the Nation State Law that was passed since our last visit to the Holy Land. Local Christian leaders have warned that this creates a "constitutional and legal basis for discrimination" against minorities, undermining the ideals of equality, justice and democracy.[1] We stand with Israel's Christians and all those challenging discrimination, in support of their call to protect the country's pluralism.

As we approach this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we reaffirm our solidarity with all of the Churches here, and pray that Christians may work more closely together in the pursuit of justice and peace.

Human dignity under occupation

Our delegation also traveled to Palestine, where despite the faith and resilience of those we met, the misery of occupation has been deepened by severe cuts to humanitarian funding by the US government.

Healthcare, education and other basic services for refugees are being increasingly threatened, exacerbating the ongoing violations of their fundamental human dignity. This cannot be ignored or tolerated.

We call upon our own governments to help meet the funding gaps now faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and redouble their efforts towards a diplomatic solution, with two democratic sovereign states of Israel and Palestine existing in peace.

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Hope for the future

We are a people who believe in the truth of the Resurrection and so we have hope for the future. As we return to our home countries we echo the words of Pope Francis:

"Always know in your heart that God is by your side; he never abandons you! Let us never lose hope! Let us never allow it to die in our hearts!"[2]

We admire our sisters and brothers in the Holy Land for not losing hope and we commit ourselves through prayer, pilgrimage and practical solidarity, to helping keep that hope alive.

Bishop Declan Lang – England and Wales (Chair of the Holy Land Coordination)

Bishop Stephen Ackermann – Germany

Archbishop Stephen Brislin – South Africa

Archbishop Timothy Broglio – United States of America

Bishop Peter Bürcher – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

Bishop Rodolfo Cetoloni – Italy

Bishop Christopher Chessun – the Church of England

Bishop Michel Dubost – France

Bishop Lionel Gendron – Canada

Bishop Felix Gmur – Switzerland

Bishop William Kenney – England and Wales

Bishop Alan McGuckian – Ireland

Bishop William Nolan – Scotland

Bishop José Ornelas Carvalho – Portugal

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Bishop Noel Treanor – Ireland

Source: Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

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