

Jerusalem, 18 February 2022

Her Excellency Ms. Tamar Zandberg
Minister for the Protection
Of the Environment

Your Excellency,

We the heads of Churches in the Holy Land write to you to express our gravest concern and unequivocal objection to plan no. 101-0674788, advanced by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, for the designation and subsequent declaration of large spaces of the Mt. of Olives, in the Holy City of Jerusalem, as National Park.

The Mt. of Olives is one of the holiest sites for Christianity. It hosts some of the most important shrines for Christians which, outside of the necessary pandemic restrictions, are visited by millions of pilgrims every year. Our Churches work relentlessly to preserve the sacred character of the mountain and its accessibility to pilgrims and visitors.

In recent years, we cannot help but feel that various entities are seeking to minimize, not to say *eliminate* any non-Jewish characteristics of the Holy City by attempting to alter the Status Quo in this holy mountain. They have failed due to the objection and lack of cooperation from the Churches. After their attempts failed they resorted to statutory powers by advancing a plan to declare vast parts of the mountain as a national park.

Although the plan is officially presented by the INPA, it seems that it was put forward and is being orchestrated, advanced and promoted by entities whose apparent sole purpose is to *confiscate and nationalize* one of the holiest sites for Christianity and alter its nature.

This is a brutal measure that constitutes a direct and premeditated attack on the Christians in the Holy Land, on the churches and on their ancient, internationally guaranteed rights in the Holy City. Under the guise of

protecting green spaces, the plan appears to serve an ideological agenda that denies the status and rights of Christians in Jerusalem.

Regretfully, this is not the first time the INPA is playing a hostile role against the Churches and the Christian presence in the Holy Land. We are saddened to see such an important Authority being misused in this way.

We therefore implore you to instruct the INPA to withdraw this plan and to cease its advancement. We further ask you to take all the necessary measures to ensure that the INPA fulfils its mandate far from any political and ideological considerations that are not strictly linked to its mission, being the promotion and protection of nature.



Greek Orthodox Patriarch
of Jerusalem



FRANCESCO PATTON OFM
Custos of the Holy Land



ARCH NOURHAN MANOUGIAN
Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem

- CC. Mr. René Troccaz, Consul General of France in Jerusalem
Mr. Ahmet Riza Demirer, Consul General of Turkey in Jerusalem
Mr. Giuseppe Fedele, Consul General of Italy in Jerusalem
Mr. Evangelos Vlioras, Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem
Mr. Alfonso Lucini Mateo, Consul General of Spain in Jerusalem
Mrs. Diane Corner, Consul General of United Kingdom in Jerusalem
Mr. Wilfried Pfeffer, Consul General of Belgium in Jerusalem
Arch. Adolfo Tito Yllana, Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem
Mr. Julius Liljeström, Consul General of Sweden in Jerusalem