

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Jordan and the Holy Land*



**الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية
في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة**

Jerusalem on 14 July 2022

**President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500
United States of America**

Dear Mr. President,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Mr. President, as the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and as a religious leader in the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches of Jerusalem, I write to share with you my grave concerns over the declining numbers of local Christians in the Holy Land, particularly in Jerusalem.

As you know, the Holy Land is not only the birthplace of Jesus but also the birthplace of the Christian church. Palestinian Christians take seriously our role as caretakers of holy Christian places, as hosts to the Christian pilgrims from around the world who visit the Holy Land, and as part of the fabric of religious life here alongside our Jewish and Muslim neighbors. We also represent a crucial voice in the work for peace with justice for all Palestinians and Israelis.

I strongly believe that the United States can make a substantial contribution to improving the daily lives of our local Palestinian Christian community in the Holy Land by addressing some of the issues that affect our ongoing presence as a community, and the dignity and wellbeing of our members. Among the significant issues affecting the Christian presence are: increased attacks against Christians and religious leaders, issues related to equality, peace, and justice, and most importantly, the Israeli family reunification law.

According to a recent statement issued by the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches of Jerusalem, "throughout the Holy Land, Christians have become the target of frequent and sustained attacks by fringe radical groups. Since 2012 there have been countless incidents of physical and verbal assaults against priests and other clergy, attacks on Christian churches, with holy sites regularly vandalized and desecrated, and ongoing intimidation of local Christians who simply seek to worship freely and go about their daily lives. These tactics are being used by such radical groups in a systematic attempt to drive the Christian community out of Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land". Nevertheless, "we acknowledge with gratitude the declared commitment of the Israeli government to uphold a safe and secure home for Christians in the Holy Land and to preserve the Christian community as an integral part of the tapestry of the local community."

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Issues of equality, justice, and peace have an existential impact on our lives in all of Palestine and Israel. As people who experience this conflict every day, we know the only path to security and mutual prosperity is true peace. We hope and pray that your efforts will be successful and blessed.

In the meantime, we would like to bring up one concrete and pertinent issue: the [Israeli law banning the unification](#) of Palestinian families. This law affects all Palestinian families, but disproportionately affects the already small Palestinian Christian community (less than 1% of the population). Everyone has a right to a family, and to live with their loved ones in their own homeland, without having to wait in anxious uncertainty, and for indefinite periods, to receive family unification permits. If the U.S. were to work with Israel to address even this one issue of family unification, it would make a great impact on the path towards mutual equality and peace.

Dear Mr. President, we would like to thank you for this historical visit to the Holy Land, and we pray to God to guide your steps, inspire your action, and give you the courage to make a change, no matter how small, in the deep still waters of this land. We trust that the American commitment to human rights and international law will support arrangements like family reunification that uphold human dignity and freedom of religion for all the peoples of the land.

We would also like to thank the American People and your administration for the continuous support to our people, and we hope to have more support to our schools and hospitals that provide vital and high-quality services to our people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, or social background.

Most respectfully,

Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar

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