



*Dear Fellow Americans, People and Representatives*

Re: In response to the Congress proposed resolution on Palestinian Christians

We have read the Congress' proposed resolution regarding the plight of the Palestinian Christians. Though we are very encouraged by the interest shown by Congressmen on the difficulties and problems faced by the world's oldest Christian community, we, however, are dismayed by this resolution purporting to act on our behalf. The resolution has been drafted without any consultation with the Christians of the region, and seems designed to mislead Congress as to the real threat that faces our community.

The issue of Christian emigration from the birth place of Christianity is very disturbing and threatens the existence of indigenous Christians who have been safeguarding sacred Christian traditions for centuries. It is misleading however, to relate this issue to the Muslim-Christian relationship in the occupied Palestinian territory. The strongest factors explaining the conditions of the Christian Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) are tied to policies and practices of the Israeli government in the OPT

Like their fellow Muslim Palestinians, Christians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip suffer from the 38 year-long Israeli occupation of their lands, and its subsequent policies, many of which are in violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Israeli barrier, for example, is built on privately-owned Palestinian land within Bethlehem. This 8-meter high concrete wall, did not only result in encaging Bethlehem and making it an open air prison but it has also resulted in the loss of most of Bethlehem's arable lands and many of our major landmarks. It has severed Bethlehem from Jerusalem, two cities that have historically enjoyed interdependent kinship, trade and social relations. Due to Israel's measures, the majority of Palestinian Christians are unable to access Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and are, therefore, denied their basic right of freedom of worship.

We urge you to vote down this resolution and to engage proactively with our plight. Christian Palestinians are grateful to those who, in good faith, take measures to protect their basic rights. However, the most severe violations of Christian Palestinian rights stem from Israel's policies and practices in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Accordingly, the greatest support to Christian Palestinians is support that aims to end Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territory.

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