

Jerusalem 5, 2022

The Honorable

Congressman Joaquin Castro,

Congressman Gus Bilirakis,

Congressman James P. McGovern,

Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo,

Congresswoman Jackie Speier

Congressman French Hill,

Congressman Andy Harris

Congresswoman Nicole Malliotakis.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, Members of Congress of the United States,

Christ is risen!

Please accept our deep thanks for your letter of 29 April 2022, to Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken. We are grateful for your request that the Biden Administration protect religious freedom abroad as a critical element of U.S. foreign policy, and for your deep concern regarding the rise in attacks against the Christian community in Jerusalem. Indeed, we hope and pray that the State Department will work with the Israeli government to uphold the latter's stated commitment to international conventions and freedom of worship for all religions, and to hold accountable radical Israeli groups who attack Christian clergy and take over church property.

This Easter 2022, as has been the case for the past 15 years, many Christians from the West Bank were denied permits to enter Jerusalem to take part in the Holy Week celebrations. Christians who were able to make it to Jerusalem witnessed parades being interrupted and members of our community, families and friends, clergy and pilgrims beaten by Israeli police and denied access to the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre) and the Christian Quarter, during Holy Fire Saturday. Such is this blatant violation by the Israeli authorities in a series of infringements and intimidation, highlighted repeatedly by the local Church leaders in Jerusalem.

The Christian community of Jerusalem sees your letter of concern to Secretary Blinken as both a much needed call for action but also a message of hope to protect freedom and access to worship in Jerusalem, and preserve the Status Quo and identity of Jerusalem as the city holy to the three monotheistic faiths.

We look forward to the visit of President Joe Biden in June and we pray that you may convey to the Administration the importance for the President to meet with the Heads of Churches and Muslim leaders in Jerusalem; to listen to them and to learn about their excellent efforts in our local community and to explore together how Jerusalem can be protected as a city holy to all.

With God's grace and blessing

Christian Organizations in the Holy Land:

Al Liqa' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land

Arab Catholic Scouts - Jerusalem

Arab Education Institute - Pax Christi

Arab Orthodox Society

Arab Orthodox Union Club - Jerusalem

Armenian Young Men's Society (Hoyetchmen) Jerusalem

Bethlehem Bible College

Birzeit Orthodox Scouts Group

Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches

Diyar Consortium

Greek Catholic Annunciation Society Jerusalem

Holy Land Trust

Homenetmen Jerusalem

International Christian Committee

Jerusalem Armenian Benevolent Union (PARISIRADZ)

Joint Advocacy Initiative of YWCA and YMCA

Kairos Palestine

National Christian Association

Presbyterian Church In The Holy Land

Sabeel-Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center

Salt of the Earth Young Christian's

Shepherds Scouts Group - Evangelical Lutheran Church Beit Sahour

The Arab Orthodox Club - Bethlehem

The Arab Orthodox Club - Ramallah

The Arab Orthodox Cultural Club- Beit Sahour

The Arab Orthodox Sports Club-Beit Jala

The Catechetical Office of the Latin Patriarchate

The Four Homes of Mercy

The General Secretariat of Christian Youth in Palestine "The Youth of Jesus' Homeland "

The Greek Catholic Scout Group

The Syriac Orthodox Scouts - Jerusalem

Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center

YMCA-East Jerusalem

YWCA of Palestine