

**THE COURAGE TO ACHIEVE PEACE IN THE HOLY LAND:
COMMUNIQUE OF THE
COORDINATION OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
IN SUPPORT OF THE CHURCH IN THE HOLY LAND**

*January 14, 2010
Jerusalem*

At our tenth meeting in the Holy Land, Patriarch Fouad Twal reflected on the pilgrimage of Pope Benedict XVI in May 2009. In union with our Holy Father we call for justice and peace for all of the peoples of this land. We make his departing appeal our own:

No friend of the Israelis and the Palestinians can fail to be saddened by the continuing tension between your two peoples. No friend can fail to weep at the suffering and loss of life that both peoples have endured over the last six decades. Allow me to make this appeal to all the people of these lands: No more bloodshed! No more fighting! No more terrorism! No more war! Instead let us break the vicious circle of violence. Let there be lasting peace based on justice, let there be genuine reconciliation and healing. Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-state solution become a reality, not remain a dream. And let peace spread outwards from these lands, let them serve as a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6), bringing hope to the many other regions that are affected by conflict. (May 15, 2009)

Eight months later a two-state solution does not seem any closer. Many express a desire for peace, but what is needed is a commitment to justice that secures peace. The solutions are well known to leaders, but what is needed is political will and courage.

Jerusalem, a city holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims, offers a special place where different peoples and different religions could come together in dialogue and respect; sadly it is the volatile core of the conflict. There is a growing distance between Israelis and Palestinians—a lack of human contact that undermines trust and dialogue. Violence, insecurity, home demolitions, permit and visa problems, the route of the wall, expropriation of lands and other policies threaten both a two-state solution and the Christian presence. Furthermore, we encourage the full implementation of the Fundamental Agreement and the facilitation of visas for pastoral workers to enable the Church to fulfill its mission.

The deteriorating situation is not good for Israelis, Palestinians, the region and the world. Through our efforts we hope to focus the eyes of Catholics around the world on what happens here. We call upon the faithful in our nations to pray for the Church in the Holy Land, for a just peace, and for the success of the forthcoming Synod on the Middle East which is important for the whole region and the world.

We encourage our people to learn about the situation and to come on pilgrimage to witness the vibrant faith of the "living stones" of the local Church—the "Fifth Gospel". We urge them to support public officials who take courageous initiatives for a just resolution of the conflict—a two-state solution with security and recognition for Israel, and a viable and independent state for Palestinians. For us, this is not merely about politics; it is an issue of basic human rights.

In the current situation, it is difficult to sustain hope, but as Christians we were all born with Jesus Christ in Bethlehem; we all died and rise to new life in Jerusalem. Despite the wounds of this land, love and hope are alive. Peace with justice is within reach, but political leaders and all people of goodwill need courage to achieve it.

Signatories:

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