



## THE BETHLEHEM ASSOCIATION

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June 17, 2006

Congressmen Michael McCaul and Joseph Crowley,  
415 Cannon House Office Building / 312 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Proposed Resolution Condemning the Treatment  
of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land

Dear Congressmen:

Thank you for your interest in the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

The referenced resolution currently being circulated in Congress incorrectly portrays the situation of the Palestinian Christians and their treatment under the Palestinian Authority. It contains **falsehoods, serious inaccuracies, exaggerations and major omissions.**

This resolution is not based on the concerns most frequently expressed by Christians in the Holy Land and **does not even mention** the fundamental cause of hardships for Palestinian Christians - **the forty year military occupation by Israel of the West Bank and Gaza.** You evidently did not consult the Christian community and Churches in the Holy Land and their U.S. counterparts. Some of the important facts omitted by the resolution are:

- 1) Emigration of Palestinian Christians was at its peak in:
  - The 1948 war when tens of thousands were driven out of their land by Israeli military forces
  - The 1967 Israeli invasion of the West Bank
  - The 2001/2002 Israeli invasion of the town of Bethlehem when over 2000 Palestinian Christians left the town.In fact, when the control of the town of Bethlehem was transferred to the Palestinian Authority in 1994, most Christians remained in their town and the economy started improving until the Israeli reoccupation in 2001.
- 2) Palestinian Christians have always identified with the national aim of the creation of Palestinian state: independence from Israel.
- 3) The percentage of Palestinian Christians holding high positions in the Palestinian Authority is higher than the percentage of Christian Palestinians in Palestine. There are no Israeli Christians holding any significant government position in Israel.
- 4) Since the occupation, Israel has confiscated and illegally taken over valuable Christian land and property throughout Palestine. More recently, they announced they intend to tax all property belonging to the Christian Churches. The Palestinian Authority has respected all Church property.
- 5) The Palestinian Authority has upheld the status quo that the Mayor of Bethlehem be a

Christian Palestinian, despite the fact that Christians have become a minority in Bethlehem itself after the Israeli occupation.

- 6) For the past 20 years the Israeli authorities have consistently denied Palestinian Christians the right to practice their faith by prohibiting them from worshiping in Jerusalem during Holy Week and Easter. The Palestinian Authority has never interfered with the right of Palestinian Christians to practice their religion.

I agree that some Christian-Muslim tensions do exist and should be addressed. In addition, the Palestinian Authority should be stabilized so that it can enforce the rule of law.

However, justice to Christian Palestinians can only be achieved with justice to the Palestinian nation as a whole. This can be made possible only by ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and resolving the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While it may have been your intent in drafting this resolution to help the Holy Land Christians, this resolution ignores the true cause of the plight of Palestinian Christians. Namely, the Israeli occupation. It also drives a dangerous wedge between Christian and Muslim Palestinians and risks making the minority Christian population even more vulnerable at a time of already heightened internal Palestinian friction. Such a one-sided resolution also confirms the Arab world's perception that America is hopelessly anti-Arab and anti-Muslim.

I kindly request that you engage in further study of the situation of the Palestinian Christians before this resolution goes any further. **A congressional hearing should be conducted with input from a wide spectrum of Holy Land Christians themselves and in consultation with major Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical US churches and church-related organizations.**

The Bethlehem Association consists of many members who have sought refuge in the U.S. because of the intolerable conditions created by the Israeli occupation of 1948 and 1967. We will be happy to send a delegation of members with first hand experience to testify about the true cause of the plight of Palestinian Christians at any hearing you may wish to hold on this matter. We await your response.

Sincerely,

*E. A. Hazboun*

Dr. Edward A. Hazboun  
Founder and Board Member

cc: Executive Committee