

Christian Leaders in Sweden to EU: Stop Israeli Annexation

“Now everyone is bleeding”, says renowned Christian leader and nonviolence activist Jean Zaru in Ramallah, trying to describe the situation in the holy land. She continues:

“We Palestinians are bleeding physically. Israel is bleeding morally.”

Yet another voice of despair comes from Nora Carmi in Jerusalem. For many years, she has been part of the Christian movements Sabeel and Kairos Palestine, in a relentless strive for a just peace between Israel and Palestine. The agony can be heard in her voice as she concludes:

“From a human point of view, the Palestinian project has come to an end. When the annexation of the West bank starts there is only one other ‘two state solution’ – Israel and the Gaza strip.”

Tomorrow, Friday May 15 2020, may be the day when the future of Jean Zaru, Nora Carmi and the Christian community of the holy land is decided upon, as the foreign ministers of the EU gather to discuss the future of the Palestinian people. What is at stake is how the European Union will respond to the Israeli plans to annex large parts of the West bank, starting July 1.

Around the world, voices are raised, calling on the EU to forcefully condemn the annexation by implementing far-reaching sanctions and restrictions against Israel, in line with those enforced against Russia in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Annexation would be the final nail to the coffin of any two-state solution; the vision of two independent and peaceful states – Israel and Palestine - alongside each other in line with International Law and United Nations resolutions. International Law and UN resolutions (from Resolution UN 181 to SC 2334) forms the basis for both the state of Israel and the state of Palestine.

Annexation of the West Bank will turn the Palestinian people – including fractions of Palestinian Christians and other groups intrinsic to the community – into a people without legal protection, without access to fundamental civil and democratic rights. The name for such a system, in Afrikaans and in International Law, is apartheid. Such a system is a crime against humanity and demands the intervention of the international community.

Israel’s annexation comes timely - as the world is focused on ending the Corona pandemic. But the annexation also has the unprecedented and vital backing of the USA, consenting to Israel’s breach of International Law. The Christians of the holy land have time and again exposed Trump’s so-called ‘peace plan’ for what it is – a plan that takes neither International Law nor the Christian community in to account.

In the most recent statement from May 7 (www.lpj.org) the thirteen Heads of Churches in Jerusalem once again point to how the Palestinian Christians are completely absent from the plans, demanding compliance with International Law and calling for peace, justice and safety for all. In

that statement the Christian leadership further calls for unity among its own Palestinian political leadership - in order to present a unified front dedicated to achieving peace.

In the Israeli daily Haaretz (May 5 2020) the Catholic priest Jamal Khader and his Lutheran colleague Munther Isaac both living in Bethlehem, describe what they see ahead of them if the annexation is carried out: "The plan transforms the Holy Land into a "Zionist fairyland" for the enjoyment of extreme Christian evangelicals and Jews, while the local Christian population remains subjugated under Israel's coercion. In fact, the plan maintains a cruel and artificial separation between two cities with key Christian holy sites – Bethlehem and Jerusalem."

There are moments that are forever carved into history. Years when devastating decisions with disastrous consequences were taken. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 is such a moment, still profoundly impacting the continent of Africa. Another is May 16 1916 when France and Great Britain drafted, with the support of Russia, a plan for the division of the Middle East after WW1. Will the silence of the world turn 2020 into yet another bleak year, now in the history of the holy land? Will this be the moment when the plans of the extremist settler movement were not challenged, and the state of Israel chose apartheid?

Within all the Abrahamic religions, prophets hold prominent positions. A prophet is someone who sternly faces even uncomfortable truths – but are still able to mediate hope. Further, prophets are characterised by a divine pathos for justice and peace.

We, the authors of this call, have heard the prophetic voice of the Palestinian Christianity, a voice that cannot stay silent when immoral plans are carried out. In Israel the settler movement and the right-wing political agenda is no longer at the periphery. More and more it eats into society, affecting everyone. Demolishing a house here. Killing a little girl there. Yet another olive-pit torn out and destroyed. Yet another nightly incursion, anywhere, everywhere. The plan is set to be implemented by December 2024. But to this, the Christians in Palestine refuse to be passive bystanders. They are a part of a growing nonviolent movement that is diligently requesting support from the international community, but rarely get it - and most definitely not from the West.

Will the European Union now take actions, putting sanctions on Israel to stop the annexation of the West Bank and restore International Law?

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