

World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel
22-28 September 2013

2013 Theme: “Jerusalem, the City of Justice and Peace”

An initiative of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) of the World Council of Churches

Proposed Action and Advocacy for WWPPI 2013

Theme: To pray, you need a military permit

Introduction

For the past decade, Israeli policies have been placing severe restrictions on access to Jerusalem, and both Muslims and Christians feel unsafe and insecure every time they approach the Old City for worship, especially on holidays. While West Bank and Gaza Palestinians cannot access the city almost all year except on certain holidays and in limited numbers, even Jerusalem Palestinian residents find it very difficult to access their holy places on their holiest days.

West Bank and Gaza Christians are only issued a few thousand permits every year to visit Jerusalem on their holidays. Often, these permits are granted to only select members of a family, which makes it impossible for a whole family to celebrate holidays together. Many more are refused permits. Others are told by the Israeli officials they have been issued permits, yet they never actually receive the documents that will allow access.

During Muslim holidays, there is no permit system. Instead, the Israeli authorities allow only persons of certain ages, usually under 14 years and over 35 years, to pass through the check points during holidays.

By contrast, during Jewish holidays, Jews are granted free access to Jerusalem; at the same time, roads and check points reserved for Palestinians are closed, and no permits are granted to Palestinians.

This policy of granting unrestricted and at times exclusive access to Jerusalem for Jews, while placing increasing restrictions on Palestinians on their access to Jerusalem, is discriminatory against the Palestinian people and contrary to human rights in general.

Joint Action

On Sunday 22 September, as part of the observance of WWPP1 2013, we encourage participants to perform the following action:

- Block your own church entrance with barbed wire or a barrier, explaining that members of the congregation do not have the proper permit to enter church.
- A few minutes before the church service begins, welcome the faithful with this reading from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, issued during Easter 2013 in response to the treatment of Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities¹:

A Statement from the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, concerning the Israeli police measures on Holy Saturday, May 2013

We, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, watched with sorrowful hearts the horrific scenes of the brutal treatment of our clergy, people, and pilgrims in the Old City of Jerusalem during Holy Saturday. A day of joy and celebration was turned to great sorrow and pain for some of our faithful because they were ill-treated by some Israeli policemen who were present around the gates of the Old City and passages that lead to the Holy Sepulcher.

We understand the necessity and the importance of the presence of security forces to ensure order and stability, and for organizing the celebration of the Holy Fire at the Church of the Resurrection. Yet, it is not acceptable that under pretext of security and order, our clergy and people are indiscriminately and brutally beaten, and prevented from entering their churches, monasteries and convents.

We urge the Israeli authorities, especially the Ministry of Interior and the police department in Jerusalem, to seriously consider our complaints, to hold responsibility and to condemn all acts of violence against our faithful and the clergy who were ill-treated by the police. We deplore that every year, the police measures are becoming tougher, and we expect that these accidents will not be repeated and the police should be more sensitive and respectful if they seek to protect and serve.

We also denounce all those who are blaming the churches and holding them responsible of the Israeli measures during Holy Week celebrations. On the contrary, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem condemn all of these measures and violations of Christians' rights to worship in their churches and Holy Sites. Therefore, we condemn all measures of closing the Old City and urge the Israeli authorities to allow full access to the Holy sites during Holy Week of both Church Calendars.

Signed, The Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

¹ For a more detailed description of the events of Holy Saturday in Jerusalem, May 2013, visit <http://www.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=4032&ed=219&edid=219>

Joint Advocacy

Write and visit your local political representatives and/or church leaders to urge them to condemn these actions by the Israeli government, and to urge that all persons be granted equal access to holy sites in Jerusalem.